

TONGA RELIGIOUS LIFE IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY



Elizabeth Colson

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IN THE
TWENTIETH CENTURY

Elizabeth Colson

*Bookworld Publishers
P.O. Box 32581, Lusaka, Zambia
2006*

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ISBN: 9982 24 045 5

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PREFACE

My involvement in Tonga life stems from 1946 when I arrived in what was then Northern Rhodesia as a new research officer of the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute assigned to work among the Plateau Tonga. By then they had been influenced by Christian missionaries for half a century. However, appeals for rain continued to be made at some communal shrines and many Tonga continued to make offerings to the ancestors and rely upon them for protection. In 1949 I paid my first visit to Gwembe Valley, where mission influence was still minimal, except for some neighbourhoods in Mweemba Chieftaincy in Gwembe South. I began long-term research in Gwembe in 1956, returning at regular intervals throughout the rest of the century. My last visit was in 2005. Meantime, in 1964 colonial rule ended and Northern Rhodesia became the independent country Zambia.

Some of those I knew in the 1940s and 1950s were adult by 1890 and held vivid memories of Ndebele and Lozi raids in which a number of their fellow Tonga had been taken captive. Their parents had watched David Livingstone encamped near their villages on his 1856 trek across the Plateau en route to the mouth of the Zambezi River or on his 1862 trek up the Zambezi. They remembered songs commenting on early encounters with other Europeans such as Frederick Selous. They had experienced the arrival of colonial administrators, traders, missionaries and European and Indian settlers. A few of them saw the end of colonial rule in 1964. I have drawn on their experience and the experience of their children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren who in turn have dealt with the flux of change which has been their lives. All this provides the basis for my understanding of what I call Tonga religious experience, which involves a search for understanding and reassurance in a chaotic world.

This book has been long in the making. A first draft of much of it was written in 1981-82 and made available to those teaching religious studies at the University of Zambia and to other concerned scholars. Subsequently it has been revised and expanded after each return to Zambia. In the 1990s a rich source of information became available in daily diaries kept by Gwembe village assistants. These illuminate current practice and belief. Despite the very obvious influences of Christianity

in the diaries and in what I have seen and heard during my recent visits, much of what I wrote in 1981 remains essentially sound in 2006, at least with respect to basic orientations. I have cited only a tiny portion of the many references to religious practices and to experiences with witchcraft contained in the diaries or field notes, but they lie behind my generalizations. Some diaries are kept in English, others in ciTonga. I am responsible for translating the latter into English. When the diaries are cited verbatim at any length, whether the original text or the translated text, I have placed the material as indented passages. This is done to avoid interrupting the flow of the argument while at the same time giving some indication of the richness of the ethnographic record on which this account rests.

In 1946-47 and 1948-50 I worked among Tonga-speakers of the Zambian Plateau, in what was then Mazabuka District but is now divided among Choma, Monze, and Mazabuka Districts. I also spent one month in 1949 in Chibbwe neighbourhood on the Zambezi River, in Chipeco Chieftaincy in Gwembe Valley. On returning to Zambia in the years after 1950, I have tried to visit Plateau villages where I worked in the 1940s and have talked with old friends including some settled in towns and cities. This gives me a sense of continuities and innovations among the people of the Plateau. I have also drawn on recent books in ciTonga on various aspects of Plateau Tonga culture (community shrines, birth, death, etc) published by Mukanzubo Cultural Research Institute, and on the excellent unpublished Master's Thesis on Plateau Tonga rain shrines written by Mr. Emmerson Machila (submitted to the History Department, University of Zambia, 1990). This is based on interviews and observation at appeals for rain held at various shrines in 1987. I also benefitted from Bonnie Keller's 1977 research on Tonga women settled in the town of Mazabuka.

My deepest involvement since 1956 has been with the people of the Gwembe Valley, in what was then Gwembe District but, since the beginning of the 1990s, has been divided into the Districts of Siavonga, Gwembe and Sinazongwe. These coincide with the different regions which I and my colleague Thayer Scudder have called Gwembe North, Gwembe Central, and Gwembe South. It is convenient here to continue to so designate the different parts of the valley since

their residents continue to be known as Gwembe people though not all are Tonga-speaking. Scudder and I began work in Gwembe in 1956-57. Subsequently, either one or both of us have been in Gwembe in 1960, 1962-63, 1967, 1968, 1971, 1972-73, 1977, 1978, 1981-82, 1984, 1987, 1989, 1992, 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2003, 2004, 2005. Scudder and Colson (1979 and 2002) and Cliggett (2002) describe the on-going longitudinal Gwembe study. In each of the four Plateau and seven Gwembe villages (in Gwembe North, South and Central) in which I have lived, I stayed in homesteads under the protection and close surveillance of their inhabitants, but my role and my involvement changed over the years as I aged from a young woman eager to learn to an old woman expected to know. I have been present on many ritual occasions – consultations with spirit mediums, divinations, appeals for rain, harvest celebrations, funerals, girls' puberty celebrations, offerings to ancestral spirits, church services, etc., and have been party to both formal and informal discussions with old and young on matters of belief and action, and paid careful attention to changes in vocabulary. Because of long absences between visits my ci-Tonga is not good enough to be relied upon on all occasions, especially since different regions use different dialects, but it is fluent enough for me to follow many discussions, especially when I know the people well. But when I need help, I ask for it. This is available from those who have learned my linguistic limitations and are able to rephrase until I understand, and from the increasing number of those who speak English which is the official language of Zambia.

I have had access to Thayer Scudder's field notes and to Lisa Cliggett's 1994-95 field notes as well as to diaries kept by research assistants, often covering periods when I was absent. The writers include Benjamin Shipopa, Senete Adam Sikagoma, Benard Siakanomba, Hastings Banda Simalabali, Benard Simalabali, Christopher Nkiwani, Stanard Sialenga, Paul Siamwinga, Bunyika Chibilika, Jelena Chasomba, Mary Mujimba, Shadrach Siajebu, Willy Drivus Chikuni, Chester Nditwa and Ward Siakapaulu. Others who have worked with me as research assistants include Chibilika Cri, Kashente Chifumpu, Ivan Siangoloma Siamwinga, Doctor Simankawa, and Johnson Simukwe. I have referred to them by name when citing their diary entries. Otherwise I have not referred to

individuals mentioned in the text under their own names, except for two well-known *basangu* mediums and several elders.

I have gained much from discussions with other scholars who have worked for a time in the same neighborhoods where Scudder and I have worked intensively and who have helped to carry forward the Gwembe longitudinal study. These include Mary Eliza Scudder (1962-63, 1972-73, 1981-82), Jonathan Habarad (August 1987-December 1988), Carlos and Sarah Madrid (1991, 1992), Sam Clark (1991, 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997), Rhonda Gillett-Netting (1993, 1997), and Lisa Cliggett (1994-1995, 1996, 1997, 1998). In addition I have been able to draw upon the work of Ute and Ulrich Luig who, from a base in Sinazeze, carried out research on Tonga religious life in Gwembe South in 1987-1989 with return visits thereafter; Timothy Matthews whose unpublished PhD dissertation is a history of the peoples of Gwembe Valley; Bennet Siamwiza whose Masters Thesis in the Department of History, University of Zambia, comprised an intensive study of hunger in Mwemba Chieftaincy in Gwembe South, Jan Karl Hofer, who kindly sent me an English summary of his study of values and life goals of adolescents in Zambia, based in part on his 1997 interviews in Gwembe South; and a number of scholars who have worked with Tonga-speakers in Zimbabwe (Weinrich, P. Reynolds, Schuthof & Boerenkamp, and Macgregor). Anya Royce and Thayer Scudder read and commented on the book in draft and I have gained much from their critiques.

Field research was supported through 1963 by the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute, (later known as the Institute for African Studies of the University of Zambia, and now the Institute for Economic and Social Research) initially under a grant obtained by its then director, Max Gluckman, from the Colonial Development and Welfare Fund. Henry Fosbrooke, the director in 1955 at the time the decision was made to build Kariba Dam and flood much of Gwembe Tonga territory, obtained funding for Scudder's and my research in Gwembe Valley through 1963. Thereafter work has been supported by a number of sources: the Joint Committee on Africa of the Social Science Research Council and the American Council of Learned Societies, the National Science Foundation, and (for Scudder) FAO and the John Guggenheim Foundation. The University of California, Berkeley and the California Institutes of Technology helped to finance data analysis. Scudder and I have also used our own funds on occasion both to finance

revisits and to pay research assistants. We have continued to share field notes, discuss findings, and read and comment on manuscripts.

The Institute under its various names has continued to provide me with a base in Lusaka and affiliation to its university. Ilse Mwansa, the former University Affiliation Officer, has been an invaluable friend as she has to many others who have carried out research in Zambia. The Jesuit fathers at Chikuni Mission on the Plateau, the Gossner Team in Gwembe South, the priests and Sisters of Charity at Lusitu Mission in Gwembe North, and especially Sister Fabiola Thomas now stationed in Chirundu, have been supportive through the years. I have had the good fortune to enjoy the hospitality of two generations of the Savory family of the Moorings Farm, Monze, who have put up with inconvenient arrivals, repaired vehicles, stored equipment, and done more than friendship has the right to expect, as well as the friendship and support of the Chona family. Many district officials over the years have given access to district records, answered questions, and tolerated my presence. Father Edwin Flynn and Dr. Brendan Carmody of the Centre for Religious Studies at the University of Zambia and Dr. Alan Haworth of the University Medical School have shared my interest in Tonga religion and provided invaluable comment. Dr. Frank Waffer, founder of Mukanzubo Cultural Research Institute, based at Chikuni Mission, that sponsors the development of a ci-Tonga literature, and Yvonne Ndaba, also of Mukanzubo, have shared their knowledge of ci-Tonga and shown me that more continuity exists between the life I knew on the Plateau in the 1940s and the present than I had expected. Suzanne Calpestre of the George and Mary Foster Anthropology Library, University of California, Berkeley gave bibliographical assistance. I also thank Fay Gadsden of Bookworld Publishers for her editorial work and encouragement.

But my greatest debt is to Tonga men, women and children who patiently, and sometimes impatiently, accepted my presence at rituals and other gatherings, answered questions, questioned me, and demonstrated in action the values by which they live. I am especially indebted to Chiefs Chona, Mwanza, Monze and Mwanachingwala, and to the people of Mujika, Nampeyo, Katimba and Mwanachingwala neighbourhoods, all on the Plateau, and to Chiefs Chipepo and Mwemba and the people of Miyaka, Mpwe, Chezia, Chibbwe,

Kanchindu, Simankawa and Siameja neighborhoods within Gwembe Valley. It is in their villages that I have lived and it is their perspectives that permeate my understanding of Tonga religious thought and action.

CHAPTER I

TIME, SPACE AND LANGUAGE

A Definitional Problem

This book deals with the religious life of Tonga-speaking peoples of southern Zambia through time. Time is the dimension that allows us to see process, and by process I do not mean a unidirectional trend. The Oxford Dictionary definition of process is that of “a state of going on or being carried on” and it is this state “of going on” with which I am concerned here along with the language in which it is expressed.

Over time ideas, behaviour, and associations change, and they change in relationship to one another. As people meditate upon what they think is happening to themselves and others, try to make changes, and rethink what has happened, they come to new formulations that explain the why and how of their world and the extent to which their lives are controlled by forces which they think they may be able to influence by appropriate action, even if they cannot command them. In some contexts such thought and action is defined as science: in others it is defined as religion. Each is a way of acting and knowing that depends upon assumptions about extra-human forces that order the known world and produce change, whether change be cyclical or on-going. But religion, however else it is defined, has the very special characteristic of being person centred: it must provide some explanation not only of the stars and seasons but of variation in human fortune and the existence of both happiness and misery.

My endeavor in this book may be regarded as unrealistically grandiose since I attempt to examine how Tonga-speaking people of the Southern Province of Zambia have thought about the nature of their world, the meaning of their own lives, and the sources of good and evil over the last century in which their cosmology and society have been transformed. It is this that I bring together under the rubric of religion although I am well aware that no word in ciTonga equates with the English term “religion”, and that the use of Western concepts in describing phenomena from elsewhere in the world has been derogated as a form of colonialism and as an attempt at intellectual domination that distorts local systems of knowledge. On the other hand, I am certain that Tonga-speakers fluent in English would maintain that their ancestors had a religion and that phenomena I bring together here should be included within that religion, or at least discussed in conjunction with it. They would agree with African theologians who

have pondered the thought of their own people and written of religion (Idowu 1975; Kalilombe 1999; Mbiti 1970, 1975; Muzorewa 2001). Despite the complexity of the task, I am encouraged by the precedent set me by Wendy James who has written of “the intimidating variety” of the “ritual practices, cosmological theories, and religious notions” among the Uduk of the Sudan, which seemed “to defy coherent description”, and found herself able to thread her way through the complexity by looking for integrating themes (1988:2).

One Hundred Years of Change

In 1890 the Tonga-speakers of Southern Province were subsistence hoe-cultivators with some stock, living in small villages surrounded by bush or high grass on the plateau and in the hills of the Zambezi escarpment and in larger villages near the alluvial soils of the Zambezi River. Even there homesteads and fields were pressed upon by bush from which emerged elephants, other game and predators which as gatherers and hunters the villagers exploited in their turn. Men and women were intimately acquainted with the resources of their immediate vicinity (Scudder 1971, 2004) and the small number of their co-residents, but to range beyond this was to venture on foreign territory and put oneself at risk. For the most part people emphasized self-sufficiency. They were both intolerant of attempts to exert authority over them and highly conscious of their vulnerability to drought, insect scourges, epidemics and raiding parties.

Colonial rule, first under the British South Africa Company (1890-1924) and then under the British Colonial Office (1924-1964) brought relief from raiding neighbors and the attacks of slave raiders from the lower Zambezi or from the expanding Ndebele and Lozi states which made life precarious during the last half of the nineteenth century (Roberts 1976:136ff). At the same time it subjected them to taxation; a centralizing administration; involvement in the world economy through labour migration and cash cropping and later absorption into an urban labour force; recruitment for service in two world wars fought by their British rulers which took some of them to East Africa and even further afield; massive population displacements on the Plateau after 1914 to provide land for European settlers and in 1958 in Gwembe Valley because of the building of Kariba Hydroelectric dam and the formation of Kariba Lake;

Christian evangelisation and the introduction of Western style education beginning in the first decade of the century (Carmody 1992, 1999; Chipungu 1988; Colson 1958, 1960, 1962, and 1971; Luig, Ulrich 1995; Matthews 1976; Peters 1976; Scudder 1962, 1971; Scudder and Colson 1980; Scudder and Habarad 1991, Siamwiza 1993; and Vickery 1986).

The years between 1890 and 1964 saw the creation of Northern Rhodesia first as a British South African Company holding, then as a British colonial territory, and finally as a constituent unit of the short-lived Central African Federation (1953-63) created against African opposition. Tonga-speakers were among those who organized into political parties to contest European control and celebrated the transformation of Northern Rhodesia into the independent state of Zambia in 1964. In its early years Zambia prospered, largely due to its copper mines, situated well to the north of Tonga country. It built secondary schools and a university attended by many Tonga men and women. It provided roads, schools, health centres, and agricultural extension services in the rural areas, while the rapid Zambianization of government posts and industry sped young educated Zambians into positions of power and responsibility in the capital Lusaka and other urban centres, while many were sent overseas for further education or to represent their country.

Since the mid-1970s Zambia, like many other African countries, has suffered from a collapsing economy, inflation, unemployment (encouraged by structural adjustment programmes insisted upon by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund), and also from more frequent droughts possibly due to global warming which leave rural cultivators as hungry as the unemployed urban population (Saasa & Carlsson 1996; Scudder 1983, 1984, 2004). Fortunately, as its people keep consoling one another, they have been spared the horrors of civil war. Whatever else has gone wrong “we have not started to kill each other.” There thus remains a pride in being Zambian, though the ebullient self-confidence associated with the time of independence and the years of prosperity has vanished.

Zambians, including Tonga-speakers, have shared the experience of the rest of the world in learning to live with an increasing rapidity of transportation and communication that transforms experience of space. At the beginning of the century people moved along narrow

foot-paths carrying whatever needed to be transported on backs and heads. By 1906 the railway had been pushed through Plateau Tonga territory, bringing with it small commercial centres and European and Indian settlers. By the mid-1940s most Plateau neighbourhoods could be reached by car over rough bush tracks, but roads were driven through the escarpment down to the Zambezi River through Gwembe Tonga territory only in the 1950s, whereupon trading stores also followed. Literacy began to spread with the arrival of mission stations, the first arriving in 1901, whose printing presses shortly thereafter published the first books in ciTonga and began the creation of a standard ciTonga from the various regional dialects (Carmody 1992; Ulrich Luig 1996; Peters 1976; Rotberg 1965). Battery radios became common on the Plateau in the late 1940s and in Gwembe Valley in the 1960s, some programmes being broadcast in ciTonga from Radio Lusaka. Increasingly, however, even rural people also follow English broadcasts, for with Zambian independence English was made the official language of the country and the language of instruction, from the first grade in primary school, and English terms permeate the speech even of those who would say they speak only ci-Tonga. In town it has long been possible to see films and from the late 1960s television wherever electricity reached the townships, but it was only in the late 1990s that a few television sets appeared in a few Gwembe villages.

Knowledge of the world comes also from other sources. In the nineteenth century a few men travelled as far as the Indian Ocean, and men and women knew captivity in what are now Mozambique, Zimbabwe and western Zambia. Thereafter, as labour migrant men reached what are now Zimbabwe, Botswana and South Africa, and as soldiers East Africa, Madagascar and Asia. In the late 1940s the first Tonga-speakers were sent to Britain for higher education, and thereafter many have gone to Britain, and to schools in Europe, Asia, Australia, and North America, where some have found employment and others have represented their country. The Tonga kinship network therefore now encompasses the world and helps to map it.

The Reworking of Time and Space

Time has been transformed along with space. Once the world was thought to begin a few short generations prior to the life-time of

known people, parents and grandparents, with tales of earlier events floating in a past unanchored to any universalizing time-scale. Creation myths, along with other myths, were either absent or regarded as unimportant, as is characteristic throughout much of this region of Africa. The missions introduced biblical time frames. Later came time-frames derived from Western science and Western work routines. With these have come attempts on the part of Tonga educated through the schools to create a time-anchored history of Tonga-speakers as a nation to affirm their identity and importance through time (Machila 1990; Colson 1996; O'Brien 1983; O'Brien and O'Brien 1996, 2005). The passage of time has also become attached to the Western calendar, with its emphasis upon weeks as well as months, and time now is punctuated by the Christian celebration of the Sabbath or Sunday, and Christmas and Easter rather than the rituals of the agricultural year. Increasingly watches, clocks, and the wireless mark the day out in hours. Watches are also in demand as emblems of belonging to a world that measures time in hours, although the old divisions associated with the movement of the sun still govern much of village activity. So far, reconceptualizing time has had less impact than the reconceptualizing of space upon the majority of people.

In the 1940s and 1950s, when I asked elderly men and women about space, I was told that once people thought that the sky reached the earth at some point beyond the horizon, so that the world itself was a bounded region, but distance was measured by how many times one rested en route, or how many times one slept before reaching a destination. New conceptions of space have incorporated European standards of measurement, first British measures, and following Zambian independence the metric system of weights and measures. People now speak both of acres and hectares, miles and kilometres, pounds and kilograms, and pints and litres, though in practice they may compute the acre by how much land an ox team can plough in a day, and measure out commodities in bottles, cups and baskets.

The Impact on Religion

Tonga religious life inevitably has been responsive to the rethinking of space and time and the diverse experience of those who call themselves Tonga. When the twentieth century began, Tonga religious rituals

spoke to the common experiences of people living in small relatively self-sufficient egalitarian agricultural and hunting communities, whose homesteads and fields were surrounded by bush rich in game and wild plants. During the twentieth century they adopted new crops and new methods of cultivation, killed off most of the game, and chopped out the bush to cater to growing populations.

Increasingly the commonality of experience has been challenged as those born in the same neighbourhoods have pursued different careers. Even close kin face different life chances. Some are doctors or health attendants, lawyers, chemists, teachers, priests or nuns or Protestant ministers, or university faculty. Others are agricultural specialists, politicians, large-scale commercial farmers, or business men and women. The large majority of both men and women remain farmers close to the subsistence level, small traders or manual labourers. With unemployment high and desperation the condition of existence for many, some are thieves, both petty pilferers and bandits who use automatic rifles in their raids on the herds and shops of fellow Tonga and other residents of Zambia.

Radical breaks in experience are the order of the day. In 1900, people identified themselves primarily as citizens of small neighbourhoods and looked upon distant Tonga-speakers as aliens speaking different dialects, among whom they travelled at risk, although clan ties and bond-friendships gave some protection (Colson 1962:66ff). The centralization of power and resources in the twentieth century with the emergence of a state has encouraged ethnic mobilization to obtain competitive advantage and control of national institutions. Today men and women may identify themselves with other Tonga-speakers stemming from Southern Province or even with a larger ethnic unit, the so-called Bantu Botatwe, that encompasses linguistic neighbours to north and west vis-a-vis other ethnic blocks. At the same time geographical mobility, schools, employment, urban contacts, intermarriage, and the political activity associated with the struggle for power have created a Zambian nation in which many take pride and through which they find ways of conceptualizing what is happening in their own lives (Colson 1996). They mix with people from other regions of Zambia, worship in the same churches, go to the same schools and intermarry. Many today know that they are of mixed ancestry, although politically

it has not been discrete since the early 1990s to admit to a grandparent from beyond the Zambian borders.

In 1890, the Tonga experienced their religion through involvement in ritual and the explanations senior people found for perplexing particular events, and both were centred on ensuring the annual agricultural cycle or maintaining good relationships with the dead who had founded kin groups or settled neighbourhoods. No one had the authority or the ability to impose a systematic development of religious beliefs organized into sacred dogmas. Instead, people were free to believe as they could so long as they met the minimum demands of rituals associated with kin and local communities. Such conformity in itself, however, had implications, for “behaviour is a form of belief... activity expresses a value system” (Davies 2002:41), and the same forms of ritual behavior were common to most Tonga-speakers.

Here, I should make clear what I mean by ritual. Mbiti (1975:122) finds most African languages lacking a term translatable as ritual, and this is true of the Tonga language. Collins (1963) suggests *cilengwalengwa* as an appropriate term, but the word is an intensification of the more commonly heard *cilengwa*. Both derive from the passive form of the verb *kulenga*, “to create” and literally mean “something created”. In many contexts *cilengwa* means “custom”, i.e., what was created in the past. But the Tonga can and do distinguish between custom in general and those things which I designate as belonging to their ritual, for the latter connect them with the world of spirit. As Gilbert Lewis says (1980:7), ritual has a greater fixity and is bound by rules that govern the timing and sequence of what is done. Its enactment is also signalled, as he says, by a focusing of attention, an awareness that something is happening beyond the ordinary amenities of etiquette or the requirements of technique. Although Tonga rarely explain the meaning of ritual, or if they do explain, go beyond some such statement as “We do this to show the funeral is ended”, something is being expressed that goes beyond the mundane. Humphrey and Laidlaw suggest that this is true of much ritual: participants need have only a vague sense of what a ritual means (1994:180). In this, they suggest, ritual differs from most actions because its meaning does not involve the intention of the actor: the intention is to perform the act (1994:94). Nevertheless, participants recognize that something is happening. Davies (2002:4)

emphasizes “the sense of excitement and nervousness” that characterises rituals. And Gilbert Lewis (1980:31) suggests that the peculiar attention characteristic of rituals invites participants to “ungate” ordinary perceptions of objects and action so that “they are free to look for further and further echoes of its sense”.

Ritual imagery intensifies the understanding of the common experience, but leaves the imagination free to pursue its own connections. Across several hundred miles and different ecological zones, across dialectical and political boundaries, similar rituals were regularly performed and the explanations of misfortune were much the same. Ritual symbols and language developed in one part of the region found resonance elsewhere. Over the past fifty years I have heard the same songs sung at appeals for rain throughout Tonga-speaking country, on the Plateau and in Gwembe Valley, and have been told that most of these are old songs were learned when the singers were young attending appeals for rain in their own neighbourhoods.

The commonality of religious life was disrupted, however, when Christian sects established their missions and each demanded adherence to biblical doctrine interpreted in its own fashion and to rituals sanctioned by its sect. Already in the eighteenth century Catholic missions existed on the lower Zambezi and some Tonga may have known something of their teaching, but missions were built in their own territory only at the beginning of the twentieth century. The first missionaries to establish themselves were the Primitive Methodists who opened a mission on the Zambezi River in 1901 (closed between 1934 and 1951). Then came the Jesuits and Seventh Day Adventists who built at Chikuni and Rusangu on the eastern Plateau in 1905. They were followed by Mennonites and Anglicans at Macha and Mapanza on the western Plateau by 1910 (Davidson 1915; Rotberg 1965:151-155). The Church of Christ, after establishing missions among the Toka-Leya early in the century, built at Simwatachela on the Plateau around 1927. These missions were joined in the 1930s and 1940s by the Salvation Army, first at Ibbwe Munyama in the high hills of Gwembe North and then at Chikankata on the Plateau, and the Pilgrim Holiness Mission at Jembo on the Plateau near the railway line. In 1951, the latter established a station at Chabubboma on the Zambezi River in Gwembe Central. Roman Catholic missions were established at Lusitu (in Gwembe

North), Fumbo (in Gwembe Central), and Maamba (in Gwembe South) by the mid 1960s. Both Zionist and charismatic pentecostal churches began to spread in the 1980s. In the 1990s various Baptist missions, financed from the United States, began a determined attempt to establish Baptist churches among the Tonga, and the Freedom Halls of Jehovah's Witnesses spreading down the Chirundu Road were evidence that Watchtower was establishing a foothold in the region.

The early missions opened schools as a means of reaching possible adherents and until the 1960s they continued to control primary education throughout the region (Carmody 1992; Simuchimba 2004). Ergo, all teachers were expected to be evangelists and all children who went to school were subject to proselytizing and forbidden to participate in what the missions designated as demon worship. This might include the rituals of rival churches. When government took control of schools in the 1960s, knowledge of biblical doctrine was widely dispersed, but under question as a thing of the Europeans and an aspect of European domination. From then on churches associated with the old missions have faced an increasing challenge from Zambian churches such as Nzila or Tumwa, led by local leaders, or from newly arrived pentecostal and apostolic churches which base themselves on a delicate balancing of the authority of the past (i.e., the authority of the Bible and what happened two thousand and more years ago) with personal knowledge (the immediate knowledge their members have of spiritual forces).

Today Zambia is said to be a Christian country. Some 75% of its population in the early 1990s identified themselves as an adherent of a church (Gifford 1998:188; Phiri 2003). By 1990 some 50% of the people in Gwembe North were thought to be attached to an established Christian church or a pentecostal leader (Copestake 1990) and the proportion was much higher among Tonga elsewhere. By 1992 local political meetings and gatherings to discuss neighbourhood welfare opened and closed with prayer. Christian tags, often in English, permeate speeches and ordinary conversations, wherever one may be in Zambia, and are incorporated into letters and e-mails.

Horton (1971) and many others have concerned themselves with why Christianity and Islam have proved acceptable to so many people within Africa over the last century and a half. Horton ascribed it to the

spread of interpersonal networks which have broken past the old communities of kin and immediate locality catered to by the old sodalities, and cults centered on ancestors, the annual cycle of the agricultural year, and the immediate political order. In other words, the old sets of beliefs and practices were not able to provide adequate answers to the concerns and disquiets associated with changing dimensions of time and space and the expansion of personal networks. Horton suggests that Christianity and Islam were acceptable because they reenforced changes already underway as Africans' religious thought adapted to new circumstances. Others have regarded African religions as failing to meet the challenges of the expanding political and economic order, a stance challenged by African philosophers and theologians (see, e.g. Ramose 1995). With respect to Zambia, Van Binsbergen (1981: 49) has argued that religious innovation commonly reflects experience of changes in the modes of production and the production of social control, but this only says that religions will change. It does not explain why Christianity is accepted. It may provide no better mapping of whatever humans have to contend with than earlier religious thought. Many Tonga Christians still turn to this for answers to their experience of misfortune and evil, as do others in Zambia (Ter Haar 1992). In some places and times, it would be difficult to decide whether local religion has absorbed Christianity or been absorbed or replaced by it. The response to missionary teaching throughout Central and Southern Africa has varied (Ranger 1975:9ff).

The shift towards Christianity among Tonga-speakers, as elsewhere, no doubt is one consequence of the diminished power of senior people who lost much of their authority as guardians of knowledge when so many of their children were pursuing careers and meeting challenges about which they knew more than their parents. Their loss of credibility on what one needs to do to obtain a livelihood must have also undermined the credibility of their teaching in other spheres. Old forms of religious thought and action become disadvantaged when they are seen as the teaching of elders who are no longer the repositories of secular expertise (Colson 1970). Loss of authority with respect to secular knowledge has been accompanied by loss of authority in other fields.

Christianity's great advantage, as well as ultimately its greatest

handicap, is its association with the economic and political power of the West, of which Tonga villagers have become more and more aware as their own government has had to accept the strictures of donor nations and international agencies that compete to provide services once provided by missions and then by government. Christianity in Zambia is also privileged by the adoption of English as the Zambian official national language and the language of instruction, for the English religious vocabulary is Christian. Inevitably this means that religious thought is affected by the pervasiveness of English words and the intellectual baggage they imply, just as forms of worship draw upon the habituation of the body acquired during years of formal schooling (Mauss 1979; Bowie 2003).

In the 1940s I found young Plateau Tonga men urgent that I obtain Bibles for them: they thought the Bible contained the knowledge that was the source of European power, but distrusted the Bibles locally available to them on the grounds that the missions deleted essential passages of empowerment before Bibles were given to Africans. Beginning in the late 1970s, Gwembe men and women have said, with considerable bitterness, that Africans have no power comparable to that held by Europeans, that in comparison with the Europeans they can do nothing, an attitude widespread throughout Zambia (Simpson 2003:7, 119-221). The loss of faith in their own competence has been followed by a willingness to experiment with Christian rituals and dogmas. As elsewhere in Zambia, it has also led to an increased fear of sorcery and powerful medicines and so to the demand for the services of witchfinders and others who can combat evil on what is seen as its own ground (Colson 2000; Ter Haar 1992:144).

Tonga Christianity, at least until the late 1990s, whatever the denomination of its adherents, was very much a Christianity which focused on a supreme being rather than on Christ or the Holy Spirit. In it the concept of *Leza*, translated as God, has been expanded into an entity that is not only a creator but a continuing force within the contemporary world with which people can be in touch (Colson 2004a; Ulrich Luig 1996:262-263). In the late 1990s, references to Jesus became more numerous, but I am not certain just what his role is in the world of spirit.

Dillon-Malone (2004:17) has suggested that an acceptance of

Jesus as an important religious figure “does not necessarily entail an identification of Jesus with *Leza*. It is most unlikely that the Tonga will make such an identification. It is more likely that Jesus is perceived as the most important of the messengers sent by *Leza* to reveal *Leza*’s true nature.” While *Leza* is now frequently referred to, many men and women in the 1990s rarely or never invoked the assistance of spiritual forces on which people once relied – spirits associated with natural forces involved with drought and other natural threats and the spirits of the dead. Instead, as elsewhere in Zambia (Ter Haar 1992:142ff), there is an increasing preoccupation with such spirits redefined as demons, and known by this English term, which may manifest themselves in a multitude of ways and are seen as responsive to the rituals of various cults or sects that seek to control or cast out demons.

These demons now are often said to be working with Satan, a force for evil introduced by Christianity, personified and described as the foe of God, and thereby ennobled far beyond any of the spirits known to the Tonga at the beginning of the century (see Ulrich Luig 1996:261ff). Possessing spirits were formerly considered to be alien intruders who expressed their desires through the bodies of their mediums. Some now consider them to be manifestations of an inborn inherent evil that must be expelled so that the purified sufferer can live a good life. This shift from seeing suffering as something alien that must be accommodated and made serviceable to seeing it as associated with an evil component of the sufferer that must be expelled is a powerful statement of a change in Tonga concepts of agency.

Finally, since 1980 the use of witchfinders has increased markedly, as is true throughout Zambia (Auslander 1993, 1998; Bond 2001; Colson 2000; Willis 1999). However disruptive of local life they have been with their accusations and humiliating rituals of cleansing, witchfinding embodies the belief that the forces of evil are associated with human agency. It is an affirmation of the belief that the world should be an orderly one in which human beings ought to be able to prosper and live in amity, that this is the intention of the creator only thwarted by some kink in humanity itself. I do not think that such thought is a borrowing of the concept of original sin from the churches. It is too deeply imbedded for that. It reflects a belief, found throughout much of Africa as well as elsewhere in the world, that humans can

obtain power to control others and affect the natural order and that some will do so egged on by ambition or malice. But belief in the efficacy of such power seems to have grown with perception of the vast human inequalities now so obvious on the Zambian and world scene and with the recognition given to technological achievements.

Leza/God may now be thought of as both powerful and closely involved with what happens in this world, and as approachable and responsive to human appeals. But as god of all, *Leza*/God does not provide the protection desired by individuals who once found their security in the protection of kin, living and dead, but who increasingly battle as individuals with the uncaring insults of the market place and the exercise of remote political power as well as with new and frightening diseases. The churches with their ritual calendars provide a new ordering of time, their structures help to map space, and most importantly of all, perhaps, is the reassurance of fellowship provided by these new communities in circumstances where the old communities of kinship and neighbourhood are no longer seen as effective. Even so, such communities themselves may not be stable, for the Tonga, as Ulrich Luig (1996:238) observes of the Gwembe Tonga, "have always valued their individual freedom higher than their membership in any group beyond their own kin-group. This is true of organised religion, too. Noticeable representations of Tonga Christianity seem to be rather amorphous, unstable, context-bound, and situational."

Important as the churches now are, however, this is not a book about missions, churches or the conversion process. Excellent studies already exist on individual missions and their work: Seventh Day Adventist at Rusangu, Jesuit at Chikuni, Primitive Methodist at Kanchindu and Muzoka, Church of Christ at Namwianga (Peters 1976; Kanondo 2005; Carmody 1992 and 1999; Luig, Ulrich, 1996; Shewmaker 1970), and at least one study examines the origin and expansion of a Tonga founded pentecostal church (Kirsch 1998 and 2003). I am concerned rather with the lived religious life of the various Tonga whom I have known over the past fifty years and the vital changes that have led them to think and rethink why their world is as it is, why they suffer as they do, and what help there may be to protect them from whatever forces operate within and upon that world. For most of them, religion is practice that works rather than a closed

dogmatic system. It is perpetually at test and therefore always in flux.

The organization of this book

Chapter Two looks at Tonga religion as in many ways a typical Southern African religion, but one with its own specific features due to the particular experience of Tonga-speakers. Chapters Three and Four provide the essential vocabulary through which the Tonga deal with the world of spirit: their vocabulary for religious leaders and manifestations of spirit, as well as both the vocabulary and symbolic forms used in invocation and other rituals. Chapter Five explores the one-time dominant contrasting motifs of bush and village or homestead, which formerly provided a means of conceptualizing much activity. Chapter Six examines the communities through which people organized themselves in dealing with the world of spirit. Chapter Seven turns to rituals that dignify and guide the individual life course, while Chapter Eight focuses upon the funeral, whose rituals reflect the interests that once dominated Tonga life. Chapter Nine deals with the problem of evil and questions raised by the experience of pain and other misfortune, and with concepts of witchcraft that allow the Tonga to find answers in terms of human malignity.

Throughout these chapters, I try to consider the impact of ongoing experience in a changing world, including the influence of the West, on how people conceive of and engage with that world as a place ruled by forces that can be understood only through metaphor and ritual. This theme is elaborated upon in the final chapter which looks more fully at the Christian impact on Tonga understanding of the physical universe as an expression of spiritual forces, which also endow humans with the breath of life, which the Tonga call *muuya*. In it I try to sum up what I have learned over the past half century through attempting to understand the provisional solutions adopted by Tonga-speakers, who have lived with courage in a world where they know themselves to be vulnerable and find old solutions and understandings frequently under attack or no longer viable. They have faced new threats to their physical existence and to their pride in themselves as people who know how to live. They have had to rethink received wisdom and experiment with new ways of ordering their lives.

Like the rest of us, they have tried to make the world meaningful,

drawing on what they know and what they can learn, devising their own ways of coming to terms with experience.

CHAPTER II

BASIC THEMES

Tonga Religion: An African Religion

Tonga religious life, as first described to me, was very similar to that reported for other speakers of Niger-Congo languages, of which the Bantu languages form one branch. Iliffe's (1979:26-32) generalized sketch of religious life in Tanzania as of about 1900 could serve as a generalized account of Tonga religious life of about the same period. Ehret believes that the earliest speakers of Niger-Congo, long before their expansion into Central and Southern Africa, had a religion "centered on ancestor veneration and territorial spirits" (2002:89). Earth shrines everywhere, including those of West African communities (see, e.g., Goody 1962; Mather 2003), functioned much like Tonga rain shrines, and almost everywhere rituals recognize the importance of the earth and the powers inherent in nature, at what I have called Places of Power, and the power of the dead over the living, often at what I have called Shrines of the Land (Colson 1997).

Themes common throughout a large region of Southern Africa include an acceptance that human action can influence natural forces; a reliance upon the mediation of the spirits of the dead who, now invisible, have new powers over the living and influence with other invisible forces that affect human lives; emphasis placed on offering and sacrifice as mediating between humans and spirits; and a belief in some form of creative divinity that guarantees the natural order. Other similarities include the categories of spiritual entities recognized, the importance given to shrines, the nature of religious congregations, reliance on charms or medicine to enhance power and provide safeguards, and the belief that much misfortune is caused by human greed and malevolence. There is also the virtual absence of myths to explain and legitimate belief and ritual. Religious thought is usually pragmatic, dealing with the stuff of daily life.

The last is basic to much else and has frequently been recognized as an essential characteristic of African religions. Zuesse (1979:3), for instance, finds the "transcendental significance of everyday life" to be "the focus of all aspirations of genuinely religious intensity" throughout Africa, while Horton (1971) identifies the primary concern of many African religions to be the ensuring of well-being and "explanation-prediction-control" within this world.

The Tonga exemplify such pragmatism and centredness in daily life, for in the past they concerned themselves with religious activities primarily in a search for explanation and assistance in times of trouble. They operated on the belief that, through appropriate ritual and the acquisition of medicines or charms, they might be able either to avert trouble or counteract it. This pragmatism still persists. In 2001, when a number of young men in Gwembe South, who had joined a pentecostal church, asked about my church affiliation, I asked why they expected me to follow the ways of my ancestors when they had abandoned the ways of their ancestors. Their immediate response was, "But those ways don't work." Kirsch (2004:705-06) reports Christians in Gwembe South in the early twenty-first century sceptical of claims to religious authority and changing from denomination to denomination in search of something that "worked". Ten years earlier, Ute Luig found people in Gwembe South pragmatically casual about religious boundaries, as they looked for assistance now in this church or in that or in rituals that invoked spirits recognized by their elders (1998:297).

Concerns for a good life, even more than a desire for assurance that the universe is ordered and orderly, dominated religious action for most people who were little given to philosophical speculation about ultimate causes. But they did think that a good life was possible, and that it was exemplified by a harmonious homestead and village. The stuff of daily life was the very stuff of religion, providing the occasion and the setting for awareness of spirit or divinity and the symbolic forms through which it was conceptualized.

Comparison and Explanation

Various explanations have been given for the shared cultural features common to Southern Africa. Common ancestry or historical contact leading to diffusion can explain why people resemble one another, but they do not explain why certain kinds of religious behaviour emerged in the first place. Those who seek to understand behavior in terms of our biological heritage, whether they be sociobiologists or Freudians, may be able to explain why symbolic motifs that structure rituals and myths and concepts of divinity have so much in common world-wide, but they have difficulty in accounting for variation and change. Those who invoke the influence of comparable ecological

settings, economic modes of production, or social formations on conceptions of divinity and the organization of religion do better at accounting for variability and change. Marxists see economic factors, especially the organization of production, as determinative of other features. Durkheimians emphasize the primal significance of the social order in providing categories of thought used to organize the religious imagination. Changes in economy or social organization therefore lead inevitably to changes in how people think about the universe and their place within it. Either approach has explanatory value in accounting for why societies with different control over resources or different forms of social organization should differ in religion, and each assumes that religions change when the economic or social order changes.

None of these approaches can explain differences that exist even when people have a common historical origin, exploit very similar ecological settings, and live under much the same kinds of economic and social order. This is not surprising, for religious systems are complex phenomena composed of thought, action, representation, and institutionalized roles created and recreated over time by humans who have a common biological heritage but live their individual lives in circumstances that raise particular existential questions. For answers they rely upon their perception of how things occur in the world they live in, including their own bodily responses, and they use such languages as they have (including words, gestures, and play with substances) to try to pin down the meaning of it all. Crehan (1997:222) describes this process as interpreting the world through one's "basic mental furniture", and she also notes (p.33) that there is a "continual tension between knowledge of the world and experience of it – knowledge always being subject to challenge and experience always mediated by our preconceptions".

My analysis of Tonga religion is largely in terms of how the creative involvement with social organization, obtaining subsistence, and the transformative experiencing of life processes affects the way people conceive of transcendent power and therefore try to engage with it. This seems to me to explain a good deal about why religions are what they are and what empowers and guides drastic changes in religious life, including conversion to introduced religions. People inherit, borrow, and

invent, but they do so reflecting on their immediate involvement with the world as they know it, and this includes their encounters with what seems to be powerful but inexplicable.

History, Ecology, and Mundane Affairs

Before the spread of Christianity, the development of comparable rituals and religious imagery over a vast region of Southern Africa reflected basic similarities of livelihood and the centring of religion in a way of life where people saw themselves as dependent primarily upon their own resources. Given the similarity of living conditions, a new metaphor or rite was able to spread quickly from one local community to another. At the same time comparable rituals might mask differences in how people viewed their lives and their engagement with spiritual forces.

Tonga religion, as I first encountered it in 1946, emerged from the life of a Bantu-speaking people who moved into the wooded savannah country of southern Zambia probably late in the first millennium (Chaplin 1960; Fagan 1966:92-93; Matthews 1976; Roberts 1976:52ff). They certainly encountered earlier inhabitants, who probably spoke one of the San languages, and from them they may have learned to regard the eland as an animal of special ritual importance (Flynn, personal communication). They themselves were gatherers and hunters, cultivators, and owners of small stock, and, where tsetse fly was absent, herders of cattle. In many respects their economy and social order, as well as religion, conformed to Vansina's reconstruction (1990) of the life of the pioneering communities that led the Bantu expansion through the rain forests into the wooded savannah country of Southern Africa. The Tonga religious vocabulary drew largely on ancient Bantu roots.

In the west towards the Kafue River plains, Tonga homesteads were built on sandy ridges that lifted them above the annual flood. In the rift valley along the Zambezi River in the east, they were built on terraces above the river. Here, settlements were semi-permanent and closely settled neighbourhoods including a number of villages might have a total population of a thousand or more. In the escarpment hills above the Zambezi and on the plateau between the Zambezi Escarpment and the Kafue Plain, people lived in small settlements surrounded by bush or

grass, either of which might be referred to as *isokwe*, a term commonly translated as “bush” though it is also the term for weeds that threaten to overwhelm a crop. They converted bush into fields which in turn reverted to bush when fallowed, and they frequented paths leading through the bush to visit adjoining areas or for distant trade.

Bush was the common symbol for what stood outside the human order with its established routines of the settlement (*munsi*, *minsi*, plural, which can be translated as homestead in some contexts and as village in others). The forces of the bush threatened to invade the controlled space of the settlement, but were kept at bay by hoeing up new vegetation as it emerged so that the barren ground of the homestead, where much activity took place, resembled the beaten-earth floor of a dwelling. Abandoned homesteads gave way to bush, but settlement in turn expanded into and replaced bush.

The dichotomy of settlement and bush, contrasting the human order of the domestic sphere with another kind of order associated with nature, is a dominant motif throughout much of Africa (e.g., Douglas 1963:207ff; Morris 1995, 1998, 2000). This theme is returned to in Chapter Five. Here, I emphasize only that the common motif speaks to basic similarities among communities dependent upon both shifting cultivation and the bush for subsistence, whose people needed to take cognizance of the cycle of the seasons.

The Influence of the Social Order

People innovate as they borrow, and they distinguish themselves from, as well as emulate, their neighbours. If they use the same metaphors, they give them new meanings to adapt them to their own particular circumstances. They edit down or up to fit local resources. These include the complexity of their political relationships.

In contrast to ritual life in neighbouring Shona or Lozi states, Tonga religious practice was characterized by a lack of elaborate ritual, an absence of dogmatic statements of belief, and a casualness about performance which link it most closely to the practice of others who lived in small communities without powerful political rulers or an apparatus of office to insist on pageantry. Such communities are likely to share basic premises about the exercise of power and the relationships existing between basic spiritual entities.

MacGaffey (1972, 1980) attempts to show that basic social premises, including those organizing religious thought, reflect the structural characteristics of social organization, and he explains cultural similarities across societies as arising from such premises. He finds most Bantu-speakers, including the Tonga but excepting the Nyakyusa, operating with premises that emphasize effects and ends, whereas the Zande of the Sudan and the Lugbara of Uganda concern themselves with means and legitimacy, while the Nyakyusa of Tanzania, despite being Bantu-speakers, concern themselves with means and ends. MacGaffey links a focus upon effects and ends with economic regimes based on alliance strategies and bilateral allegiances.

Ethnographically this fits the Tonga who stressed the importance of matrilineal descent for inheritance and succession, but expected women to follow their husbands who could live where they found the greatest advantage. Homesteads and villages were therefore a complex of people of different lineages and with multiple ties also to the lineages of their fathers and grandfathers. The role of the father and his lineage in daily life and in the cult of the ancestors was so prominent that some have argued that the Tonga were developing towards patriliney (Lancaster 1979). Their self-governing neighbourhood communities, true participatory democracies, were composed of allied kindreds knit together also by multiple affinal ties and did not form closed corporations.

MacGaffey's model works, at this level of abstraction, to explain why the Tonga share so much with Bantu-speakers living in western Zambia and adjacent areas of Angola and the Democratic Republic of Congo who were also matrilineal and virilocal, minimized political hierarchy though to a lesser degree than the Tonga, had rather comparable subsistence patterns, and, according to McGaffey, also emphasized effects and ends. His model, however, fails to explain why they differed in some important respects. Here it may be important that the Tonga, unlike the westerners, combined animal husbandry with agriculture, hunting and gathering.

While all may have emphasized effects and ends, the westerners appealed to spirits who were represented in material form through figurines and masks that performed on ritual occasions. They relied upon communal medicines to protect and advance the welfare of

village or lineage and were subject to recurrent waves of religious activity in which new medicines were introduced and communities purified and so recreated (for Balovale, see Wastiau 2000, White 1961; Ndembu see Turner 1967, Pritchett 2001; and Kaonde, see Crehan 1997; Melland 1923). The Tonga carved neither masks nor figurines. The very few wooden masks collected in their area may be from the same village and be the work of one carver, who once lived in Western Province (Colson 1949:32-33; Vrydagh 1968). Their lack of interest in representing spirit in physical form links them to many Bantu-speakers in Eastern Africa. This may reflect their common ancestry, for Ehret regards the Tonga as belonging to an eastern branch of the Bantu expansion (2002:195). Also, like the easterners, the Tonga relied upon livestock, in addition to the hunting, gathering, and shifting agriculture (or long-term cultivation in the Zambezi Plain) that supported the western Bantu-speakers. Hopes of inheritance or access to the very tangible assets embodied in livestock provided a substantial reinforcement of the power of elders and so of the community. This may have diminished any interest in material representation of spirit enforcers.

The Tonga also resemble the eastern rather than the western Bantu in the absence of communal protective charms installed when a village moved or was created. While most Tonga homesteads, including those of some Christians, are protected by medicines that deflect sorcery attacks and many senior men have medicines for success and protection, such things are considered private rather than community matters. Their acquisition or installation is done in private without the presence of public witnesses expected in all appeals to divinity. I think this was true in the past as well as in the twentieth century. Further, the Tonga do not show the concern for community restoration or rituals of renewal, so prominent among the westerners. Kopytoff (1980:201-202) relates that concern to a fear of entropy: i.e., the sense that familiar systems are falling into disorder, and human action is needed to repair and restore them. He cites Anthony Wallace (1966:38) as identifying the fear of entropy, which Wallace saw as a universal human trait, as basic to the emergence and maintenance of religion. The westerners, according to Kopytoff, differed from other people only in being conscious that they were coping with entropy.

Rituals of renewal were not a Tonga characteristic. At times of crisis, such as the influenza epidemic of 1918-19, the smallpox epidemic of 1948, or the unexplained deaths in the Lusitu region of Gwembe North in 1959-60, villages participated in a communal ritual which involved the use of the plant *malulwe* (possibly from the verb *ku-lula*, "to be bitter", or from *ku-luula*, "to reveal"; *Cassia abbreviata*) during which they cast out evil and sent it elsewhere "to the west". That done they got on with life. Nor were they haunted by a fear of entropy, at least not until disorder began to be seen as progressive in recent years, when they were faced with the progressive disorder of the Zambian economy from the 1970s on. It is only since then that they have turned to charismatic churches which can be interpreted as revitalization movements for repairing a community that has unravelled (Scudder 1984) or for creating new communities of those "born again". The occasional employment of a witchfinder to get rid of evil medicines and reform their owners was and is meant to cleanse the community, but initiates nothing new.

The Tonga may have had less need to think in terms of community decay and renewal than the westerners, since they were not tied to a particular community through an interest in competing for largely non-existent political offices. They stressed the right of free men and women to move and form new associations if the old ones failed them, and even children were said to have the right to choose which kin they would live with. When things seemed to fall apart, they founded or joined other communities in preference to revivifying the old, secure in the knowledge that wherever they settled there would be a means of dealing with the spirits concerned with the forces of nature and that the spirits of their own dead would follow them.

In their lack of concern for communal order, as well as in other assumptions affecting religious life, the Tonga resemble peoples who rank towards the low ends of Mary Douglas's scale of role differentiation in her contrast of grid and group solidarity (Douglas 1978). In general, they paid little attention to hierarchy, though this was most elaborate in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries on the southern Zambezi Plain where hereditary chieftainship may have existed. Even there, polities were organized as participatory democracies whose members expected to think for themselves. Role differentiation was

meagre and social categories less well-defined than among the Shona, who long neighboured the Tonga on the east and south, or the Ndebele or Lozi, who invaded their territory during the late nineteenth century, or various other Zambian peoples. Tonga communities were not closed corporations. Local boundaries were flexible and permeable. Kinship units, such as clans and lineages, in practice gained and lost members.

Despite this flexibility, the Tonga operated with concepts that emphasized discrete territorial units (neighbourhood and homestead) and discrete kinship units (lineage and clan), and many attributes of their religious life were those Douglas associated with what she calls weak grid, strong group societies. Nature was seen as potentially hostile; danger threatened from foreign forces (raiding parties, medicines, new methods of sorcery); competition and envy opened the way to evil; there was a lack of “elaborate theorizing or pressure for intellectual coherence”; and funerals were a major ritual form and dealt with a major breach in group boundaries. In most respects, the Tonga fit Douglas’s model, even in having a short time-span within which all community history was once fitted. They differ from her model in that they were as skeptical of the coming of a millennium as people with longer time spans (Douglas 1978: 22, 29, 32). Even the widespread publicity given to the coming of the new millennium in 2000, which some of the Christian churches associated with the second coming of Christ, left many of them sceptics.

Goody, along with Douglas, follows Durkheim (1965) in arguing that religious relationships parallel or model themselves on social relationships, and he further invokes Levi-Strauss, whom he cites as saying “the unknowable can be conceptualized only in terms of the known” (Goody 1962:20). This, of course, pits received formulations of the social order against personal experience, and no social order is as consistent as social dogmas maintain. In practice, the known includes knowledge that people behave in unexpected ways and natural phenomena too can be unpredictable. Tonga ideas about the social world were imbued with their knowledge that people have wills and exercise them in often unexpected fashion. If they patterned their understanding of spiritual forces on their experience of the human order, it is unsurprising that they endowed spirits with independence

of action and unpredictability. They describe them as moving freely about the world, confined neither to place nor to social group, much as humans move. They dealt with spirits much as they dealt with each other, i.e., they met obligations when required to do so but hoped to avoid them, and they approached spirits in a fashion appropriate in dealings with powerful humans who may be dangerous. Spirits, like people, were expected to observe the rules of reciprocity – if they failed to make return when approached in due form, they were told in no uncertain terms that they would be forgotten and people would seek more responsive patrons. I have heard supplicants say to both communal spirits (those appealed to by territorial groups) and ancestral spirits, “If you refuse to help us, then it is no use our appealing to you. We will die and you will have no one to remember you.”

Order and Continuity

The Tonga accept the possibly transitory nature of communities of human beings, and of all spiritual forces save *Leza*, the term now identified with the Christian God. What they have seen as enduring, at least in the past, was the overall order to which new social relationships, new human beings, and new spirits would conform. In a sense, while spirits and people were geographically mobile and subject to change and extinction, the social order was defined as static. Whatever else happened, human communities would always find an ordering through clans, intermarrying matrilineages, and households created by married couples and sustained by their labour in fields won and held against the encroaching bush under the guidance of their ancestors, who would continue to intervene on their behalf with the powers inherent in the natural order.

It is this conceptual order which has been challenged by the increasing dominance of urban life and market forces, and the provision of outside assistance during the last several decades. All this calls for a rethinking of human dependence upon the world of spirits (Colson 1981). Inevitably when daily life was transformed during the twentieth century, religion too changed.

Formerly, religious activity for the most part was reactive. That is, people engaged in religious activity in response to what was seen as the intervention of spiritual forces, as Harris found among the Taita of

Kenya (1978:26). Seasonal rituals associated with the agricultural cycle might be delayed until mediums reminded people of spirit expectations, while offerings to the spirits of the dead usually came only after divination found an ancestral spirit angered at a lack of offerings or other insult. Among the more striking changes is the emergence of a new periodicity in religious activity in association with the creation of new congregations of worshippers who differentiate themselves weekly as they attend different churches.

The same neighbourhood or even village may now contain a number of different churches. These reflect new interests and new dependencies. Since the 1940s, both on the Plateau and in Gwembe Valley, people have become increasingly dependent upon engagement with those outside their immediate vicinity, as a market for their goods and as a source of essential supplies, such as clothing, tools, and food in a bad year. Neighbourhoods are no longer self-sufficient, nor completely dependent upon local rainfall. Nor does everyone within even a rural neighbourhood follow the same forms of livelihood, for some are teachers or otherwise employed, or craftsmen with an outside clientele. People have been able to make different uses of economic opportunity, and some have prospered even in bad times. Wealth differentials have become more obvious, in the form of differences in housing, household furnishings, clothing, and investment in farming equipment and other tools, as well as in food and drink. Nor are all residents of a neighbourhood connected through kinship: people from other provinces in Zambia, or even other countries, may be there because of jobs or to exploit local resources, such as the fisheries on Kariba Lake and the Zambezi and Kafue Rivers. Many children of the neighbourhood have left to become established elsewhere, and there is much visiting back and forth between urban and rural areas and from one rural area to another. Those who seem settled in a village may have spent some years in one of the cities or in another Zambian rural area. All of this makes for a great diversity of experience, and a search for new ways of conceptualizing even continuing concerns with the uncertainties of life, the mysteries of death, and the recognition of unequal fortune. Social life has become sufficiently differentiated so that those within a neighbourhood no longer find their understanding of religious symbols through an involvement in the same daily activities

and anxieties. Instead they assemble regularly on a weekly basis, and sometimes more frequently, to be instructed in what their particular congregation shares as a community. Fellowship in the church, moreover, links them not to all others inhabiting the same locality but to the dispersed community that transcends local and national boundaries. Implicitly and sometimes explicitly, they proclaim their membership in a transcendent international order associated with the loci of economic and political power.

Yet through all the changes, certain themes continue to characterize religious thought and probably have deep historic roots, although I cannot demonstrate this. It is possible that much that I see as characteristic emerged in the early years of the twentieth century after the disruptions of the mid and late nineteenth century, and was influenced by the challenges posed by colonial rule and the rapid involvement in the cash economy through labour migration and cash cropping. Prior to the mid-nineteenth century, the Tonga may have known a more elaborate hierarchical social order and their religious life may have been rich in ritual symbols whose meaning was explicated by specialized religious leaders. By the 1940s, when I first lived in Tonga villages, neighbourhood polities were ruled as parts of a much larger colonial political system which had superseded the lineage as a safeguard of life and property. As many uncertainties flowed from government and market forces as from natural forces embodied in the old metaphor of the bush or the complexities of village life. Much of the Plateau region by then was under continuous cultivation and the bush had retreated, while even in Gwembe Valley bush was losing its metaphorical significance. In the following fifty five years, incorporation into a market economy has proceeded apace, and so has the shift into Christianity.

Nevertheless, much Tonga thinking in the 1940s and 1950s about religion was reminiscent of that reported for other small shifting communities of Bantu-speakers who relied on agriculture along with gathering and hunting for subsistence. It probably reflects a long term adaptation to the uncertainties of life in southern Zambia. What I find persistent over the years, among people who still live in villages and depend on agriculture, is an emphasis on the present and the immediate future rather than the past, a casualness about ritual, the pragmatic

use of whatever seems for the moment to bring results, little interest in visualizing spirit, the belief that spiritual forces must respect the human if they are to be respected (i.e., that the relationship is a reciprocal one), and the attribution of evil to human motivation.

CHAPTER III

**TONGA RELIGIOUS VOCABULARY
AND ITS REFERENTS**

The Religious Vocabulary

Language affects the way people think and talk of spiritual forces. Ci-Tonga, like other Bantu languages, lacks gender. Its speakers, therefore, are not forced to impute gender to spirit or any other category of being, which may make personification less likely. This has not prevented other Bantu-speakers, including those in western and northwestern Zambia, from personifying divinity and making representations of various forms of spirit (Musambachime 1994; Felix and Jordan 1998; Wastiau 2000). The Tonga unwillingness to personify is probably linked to their focus on what is happening or is to happen. For them “who” is defined by “what” is happening.

I have rarely found people much concerned over whether there is only one kind of spiritual essence which manifests itself in different ways or whether the names given to various manifestations represent different entities. Such subtleties are unnecessary in the pragmatic circumstances under which most Tonga deal with spirit, and I have not encountered philosophically inclined elders prepared to consider and expound the nature of divinity and the cosmos. Nor have others working among the Tonga. Nor have we found any developed corpus of myth.

Since no one has the power to formulate belief and standardize usage, people develop their own sense of what is appropriate through listening to divinations or the discussions that evaluate indications of spirit intervention, including dreams. Those living in the same village on occasion find to their surprise that they and their neighbours have slightly different vocabularies and use terms differently. The Tonga language, moreover, encourages a play with words, and provides ways to modify a basic root to express a range of meanings through which speakers indicate what they think of the spirit forces affecting them.

This is done through prefixes used in Bantu languages to categorize objects and concepts (Collins 1962; Hopgood 1940). The choice of prefix indicates how the speaker evaluates spirits as well as other objects and forces encountered. In ci-Tonga, *ma-* is used when the speaker is stressing a collectivity, but may carry an implication of disapproval: a spirit designated by *ma-* probably is seen as acting malevolently or strangely or as of alien origin. *Ci-* (*zi-*, plural) again may have a derogatory meaning or imply diminishment. *Bu-* (*ma-*, plural) has an

abstract sense or refers to the quality of something. *Mu-* (*mi-*, plural) is used for some parts of the body, breath, work, the roadway, medicines, plants, various other phenomena, and some spirits. *Mu-* (*ba-*, plural) is the prefix used of humans, certain large animals, and some spirits. It is the most honorific (Collins 1962:11-22). Choice of prefix, which then governs the use of adjectival and verbal modifiers, indicates how the speaker evaluates what is happening.

The Tonga religious vocabulary consists of verbs referring to appropriate attitudes and actions of appeal to spirit forces, and of nouns referring to spirit categories, religious officials, specific ritual occasions, shrines and ritualized objects. The vocabulary varies slightly from one area to another, and even those living in the same village may use slightly different terms. It has also changed over time, with the introduction of new terms, the loss of various rituals, and the reevaluation of spiritual forces.

Elsewhere in Africa, where secret societies or a specialized priesthood exist, members have developed elaborate esoteric vocabularies taught only to initiates (e.g., Biebuyck 1973:66ff on the Bwami Association of the Lega of Zaire). The Tonga, by the 1940s, had no memory of such associations although it is possible that hunters' guilds, for elephant and perhaps hippo hunters, once existed. While Tonga delight in punning, proverbs and innuendo, and admire the man or woman who excels in such devices, I have found no evidence of any esoteric vocabulary, with one possible exception. In 1947, then Chief Monze, who was not a spirit medium, gave me a few words which he said had been exclusive to his predecessors, who had been mediums of the spirit Monze (Colson 2006b; Colson fieldnotes 1947). Mediums do frequently speak in glossalalia, a stream of words drawn from various languages as well as nonsense syllables, but these seem specific to the individual. When such words flow in trance, they appear to be emotive rather than instructive, and they are interpreted by an assistant who orders the message.

Ritual Actions

Verbs referring to attitude and appeal include *kukomba* ("to beg", "to implore"), *kulomba* ("to ask", "to pray"), *kulombozya* ("to praise"), *kubomba* ("to become meek" or "to humble oneself"), *kupayila* ("to offer", now

translated as “to pray”), *kupiila* (“to spurt an offering of beer or water from the mouth”). One may speak of playing (*kusobana*) during a gathering to appeal for assistance using song and dance. Someone may be entered by (*kunjilwa*) or visited by (*kuswayigwa*) or seized by (*kujatwa*) a spirit. *Kutonda* means “to forbid” or “to taboo”. Divination is *kusonda*, though since the 1980s this is being displaced by the alien term *kuchapa*, introduced to Zambia in the 1930s during the witchfinding movement known as *bamuchape*. The term spread into Tonga country in the 1940s. While, since the 1980s, it may refer to divination of any kind, it often connotes witchfinding. The drama associated with identification and cleansing of a witch is *kuchapachapa*.

Ritual Occasions

On the Plateau and in the Gwembe hills, major communal celebrations are associated with the agricultural regime. These are referred to as *lwiindi*. The two most important are the *lwiindi lwakumwaka*, associated with planting, and the *lwiindi lwakutebula*, which takes place after harvest. On each occasion, the ritually recognized households of a neighbourhood are expected to make beer for offering to the ancestors, and people go from homestead to homestead celebrating the occasion. At *lwiindi lwakumwaka*, they may also visit the community shrines (*malende*). During these occasions, actions which are matters for private settlement, such as adultery or physical violence, are either regarded as an offence against the whole community and the spirits associated with communal matters, or it is forbidden to take offence. Zambezi River communities, less dependent on a single harvest, did not celebrate either of these *lwiindi*.

Ritual associated with each stage of the agricultural cycle was referred to in common as the work of the neighbourhood (*milimo wacisi*, or *milimo wakatongo*). Purification of the neighbourhood from the death of a stranger on its soil, or of blood shed in homicide, were respectively *ingolomokwa* and *maloa*, and called for the slaughter of an animal brought by the kin of the dead man or the man who had killed, which provided meat for a communal meal.

Inkolola covers both the seclusion of a girl at puberty and the celebration of her emergence. This was a great occasion on the Plateau and in the hills. The Zambezi River people of Gwembe Central and Gwembe

South neither secluded girls at puberty nor celebrated their maturation. The other major ritual occasion associated with the life cycle which drew large numbers of people together was the funeral, *idilue* (from *kulila*, “to weep” “to cry out”), and on the Plateau the *mweesho*, the first offering of beer to the new spirit, usually some months or even a year after the funeral ended. Other occasions involved the immediate family or a group of kin rather than the general public.

Ritual Officials

Gender

In general, terms for ritual officials have no gender connotations except for those introduced through the Christian churches. This is in line with the relative autonomy that women share with men in Tonga and other societies where women control vital resources as well as their own labour. Tonga women own property, have primary claims on their children, and are regarded as persons in their own right. In the past, some Plateau women headed their own villages and were recognized as “headmen” by the early colonial administration. While living, women officiate at offerings to the ancestors. On death, they become ancestors, and as such, they exercise power over male and female descendants, other members of their lineage, and descendants of men of the lineage.

Usually only men become earth priests, but an earth priest works together with his ritual wife and in fact they hold a joint office. Both men and women serve as mediums, diviners, and herbalists, and may be identified as witches, but most suspected or accused witches are men (Colson 2000:336-37). Plateau women in the 1940s were more often accused of serious witchcraft than were Gwembe women in the 1950s. For by the 1940s, some Plateau women owned cattle and other property, often acquired through their sale of cash crops. Gwembe women became more likely suspects in the 1990s when their cattle holdings increased and some began to prosper as traders. This meant that they are now suspected of using witchcraft to further their own interests, and so they may be accused of bewitching kin to obtain control over their spirits. Diviner/witchfinders, known as *bamuchape*, who have travelled the countryside since the late 1970s to detect and cleanse witches are likely to be men, for men have greater freedom to

travel. Diviners who act as mediums of *mangelo*, *bungelengele*, and *siamwiala* spirits – new forms of possession that appeared from the 1960s on – usually work from a home base, and many of them are women.

Ritual offices associated with Christian churches are more gender specific than were the Tonga offices, reflecting the European bias against vesting religious authority in women. Nevertheless Tonga women have trained and served as protestant ministers.

Types of officiants are summarized in Table I.

TABLE I	
Categories of Officiants	Tonga Term
Earth Priest	<i>Sikatonga</i> , or <i>Sibulongo</i>
Ritual Wife of Earth Priest	<i>Mukaintu walufulu</i>
Guardian of the Bush	<i>Ulanyika</i>
Medium of Spirit affecting Nature	<i>Basangu</i>
Diviner	<i>Mung'anga</i> , or <i>Musonde</i>
Diviner witchfinder	<i>Munchape</i>
Herbalist, Healer	<i>Musilisi</i>
Witch	<i>Mulozi</i>

Earth Priests

The usual term for the officiant for the annual neighbourhood rituals associated with the agricultural year, which I translate as earth priest, is *sikatongo*. The term derives from *katongo*, the relationship between a lineage and a defined area of land (*cisi*, *masi* pl) where it has rights of first settlement. During the colonial period, *cisi* also came to refer to the area under a chief recognized by the government. In its original sense, I translate *cisi* as neighbourhood. The earth priest may also be called *sibulongo*, guardian of the earth, *bulongo* being the term for clay, or, in some contexts soil in general. In some neighbourhoods, the earth priest is differentiated from the owner of the bush, *ulanyika* (*inyika* being the term for territory, country, land or bush), who has rights over hunting and game animals, but in many neighbourhoods the two roles are merged and terms used interchangeably (Scudder 1962:111ff.). In the rituals of the neighbourhood, the earth priest works together with a wife referred to as *mukaintu walufulu*, “wife of

the calabash", *lufulu* being the gourd ladle used in offering water and beer. The earth priest and his ritual wife hold hereditary offices. Each should belong to the lineage of his or her predecessor and be the inheritor of his or her spirit (*muzimo*). They have responsibility for initiating the routines of the agricultural year, alerted by well-known indicators of vegetation, weather, and stars, or often by instructions from *basangu* mediums, i.e., those possessed by spirits associated with the rains and other communal interests. In the past they might also be in charge of initiating communal hunts as well as communal fishing of drying pans and streams (see Chapter Six).

Basangu Mediums

The office of *basangu* medium is not hereditary although some people say that possession occurs commonly in only certain lineages. Mediums are chosen by *basangu* spirits, and are themselves addressed as *basangu* during consultations, since people are addressing the possessing spirit. They may also be called *basinsimi* (*musinsimi*, sing.) from *kusinsima*, "to prophecy" which also carries the meaning of "to awaken". They can be recognized by wristlets of dark blue or black beads worn on the right wrist, and their homesteads may be marked by the presence of a *kaanda* ("small house") shrine in the dooryard.

A *basangu* spirit first makes itself known to its chosen vehicle through dreams, or by causing illness or trance. The new medium then begins to call out, speaking in possession, and those living nearby come to greet their "visitor" with characteristic clapping to find out what it wants of them. If the words of the medium are acceptable and borne out by events, then he or she continues to be consulted about affairs that trouble people, such as failure of rains, epidemics, and other disruptions in what is regarded as orderly communal and natural routines.

I have talked with and attended seances of some seven Plateau and eighteen Gwembe *basangu* mediums, and learned of many others. All mediums I have known have been adults, although several were in their twenties. People say that small children may be marked out by *basangu* as their future vehicles. I have met several such, but none became a medium in later life. Persistent illnesses or psychotic episodes may be diagnosed as indicating that a *basangu* is calling one to mediumship. Some so afflicted are said to wander away to live in

the bush until they return as mediums. Again, none of the *basangu* mediums I have known claimed to have done so prior to practising as a medium. Some said they became aware of their calling only when they first went into trance, others said they learned of it in dreams. Established mediums may have an assistant who interprets messages uttered in trance. This is necessary since the medium usually claims to know nothing of the message once the trance is ended and *basangu* messages are given in elliptical terms intermixed with foreign words or glossolalia. Again, none of the mediums I have known served as an assistant before becoming a medium. Nor do I have any evidence that mediums receive instruction in their calling other than through observation of other mediums active in their area. I do know of newly-called mediums approaching an established medium, who is expected to recognize at a glance that the visitor is a fellow vehicle of *basangu* and to confirm the calling. After he first experienced possession, Tomu Musanu of Musulumba Village, then in the hills of Gwembe Central, visited Chibwe, a famous woman medium who practiced on the Plateau in the 1940s and 1950s. He said he visited her because Hangombwe, the *basangu* that had entered him, also used her as a vehicle. Although Hangombwe was also said to possess a prominent medium in the Zimbabwe hills, Musanu did not visit him. Chibwe gave him a hoe blade and a spear in recognition of the authenticity of his calling. But in general, a medium is legitimated by fellow villagers who decide if what they hear and see indicates genuine possession or whether the medium is self-deceived or consciously deceiving them. They may decide that sometimes the person speaks as a vehicle and sometimes not. This means that each consultation is a time of renewed appraisal and the medium as vehicle is seen as fallible (Ute Luig 1998:299-300).

When a medium dies, his or her spirit inheritor inherits only the *muzimo*, the personal spirit that comes into existence after death. The possessing *basangu* eventually may manifest itself through another vehicle. Machila (1990:13) reports that in the Plateau chieftaincy of Hanjalika, a *basangu* was expected to choose another medium from the matrilineage of the dead medium, though perhaps only after some years. On both the Plateau and in Gwembe Valley, people have assured me that a *basangu* chooses its vehicles on a personal basis

rather than because of lineage or clan affiliation. Tomu Musanu and Chibwe, for instance, although vehicles of the same *basangu* were of different clans.

Mediums are not agents of ritual communities in the same way as an earth priest whose office is controlled by members of the neighbourhood. They can insist that the office be filled on the death of the old earth priest, or call upon the *katongo* lineage to replace an incumbent who is failing in his duties. When the earth priest dies, the *katongo* lineage is supposed to choose and install a successor, who inherits the ritual wife, and so continuity is maintained. Mediums on the other hand may become inactive, alleging that the *basangu* no longer enters them, and nothing can be done. Mediums move away. They die. People who once consulted them then either consult another medium already active within the neighbourhood, send a delegation to a distant medium, or wait until a *basangu* decides to address them through a new vehicle.

Basangu spirits speak through their mediums about matters of communal concern rather than individual matters. They call upon the earth priest and his wife to meet their obligations to initiate particular agricultural activities such as field cleaning, planting, weeding, bird scaring, eating of first fruits, etc. They may demand that people join as a community to visit a *malende* shrine. They may ask for an innovation in ritual, warn of coming disaster, or complain that someone in the neighbourhood has infringed the social order by forestalling the earth priest in planting or eating the new crop or by behaviour unwarranted by tradition – in the 1940s I was present when *basangu* objected to the building of square houses and the sale of crops, and demanded that matters be rectified, only to be told that this was now customary and they should come back with another message. *Basangu* may demand the ousting of the earth priest and his wife for some failure, and call for the installation of new officiants. A famous mid-twentieth century medium in the hills of Zimbabwe mandated that henceforth Thursday was to be regarded as a day of rest when no one should work in the fields, and this was observed throughout much of Southern and Central Gwembe in the 1940s and 1950s and in some neighbourhoods much later. Mediums therefore both reenforce customary procedures and open the way for innovation.

Diviner

The diviner is a key figure in religious life because it is the diviner who interprets the cause of personal suffering, prescribes action, and therefore creates the conditions which sustain belief and cause spirit to be seen as manifest. Both men and women practice the craft.

Mun'ganga (*ban'ganga*, pl) was the term commonly used on the Plateau, as throughout much of this part of Central Africa. In Gwembe Valley, *musonde* or *musonzi* (from *kusonda*, the verb for divination) was an alternative term. Beginning in the 1960s both terms began to be displaced by *munchape*, first reported in Zambia during the *bachape* movement of the 1920s, when witchfinders from Malawi arrived in the eastern and northern regions of the country bringing new techniques of divination to identify suspected witches (Richards 1935; see also Marwick 1950, Willis 1968, and Fields 1985). At that time, the people of Southern Province were either becoming cash-crop farmers, which kept them at home, or going south as labour migrants. Either way they were little interested in what was happening in the north, but in the 1940s, Plateau Tonga knew the term *munchape*. It then usually referred to a non-Tonga diviner who used a mirror or some reflecting surface for divination. With the move towards Zambian independence in the early 1960s, labour migrants began to shift to working in the towns and farms of the railway line or in Lusaka which, as capital of the country, became a meeting ground for people from all of Zambia. Then Tonga-speakers began to claim that new medicines and charms were purchased in Lusaka and from people they met on the railway line, whereas earlier Livingstone and Bulawayo were the places where new and more powerful medicines were purchased. After independence it was to Lusaka or the railway towns that they went to consult those regarded as the most powerful diviners. In the late 1970s, almost every neighbourhood in Gwembe Valley and many on the Plateau summoned witchfinders known as *bachape* to cleanse their neighbourhoods of witchcraft. Most of these belonged to some other ethnic group and were based in Lusaka. By the 1990s, many *bachape* were Tonga living in rural areas.

Other new forms of divination were associated with one of the new forms of spirit possession, similar in some respects to *masabe* possession, that appeared around the 1960s and incorporated elements

derived from some contact with pentecostalism. In the 1960s, men and women who claimed to be entered by *mangelo* (angels) might claim to have been given the power to divine the causes of individual problems and to receive messages on matters of communal interest such as the rains. They began to function like *basangu* mediums, and some, indeed, said they had been entered by both *mangelo* and *basangu*, and that it was for the *basangu* that they built the small huts that stood in their dooryards.

Starting about 1980, some mediums of other newly possessing spirits, such as *bungelengele* or *siamwiala*, also became diviners. Those possessed received different gifts, some being called to be diviners while others were called to preach. I do not think that any of these are considered to be *banchape*, nor were they usually called *bang'anga*, but people spoke of going for divination (*ku-sonda*) when they consulted them. They differed from the *ban'anga* of the 1940s and 1950s, and many in later years, in that they worked with the help of alien spirits, while the *mun'anga*, like all craft workers, was summoned to begin his or her work by a *muzimo*, the spirit of an ancestor. This was usually through a dream or through illness. Their tools of trade also differ, for the common divination devices of the 1940s and 1950s *mun'anga* were a set of divining bones (*nkata*), used by diviners elsewhere in Southern Africa, or various types of medicine horns (*nzengo*) or spindles, although some claimed to rely upon their dreams. While *mangelo*, *bungelengele*, and *siamwiala* might use some of these same devices and rely on dreams, they also used the Bible. Some dangled a weighted device over an open Bible, but, since they did not look for appropriate verses, this seemed to be for purposes of inspiration and to legitimate their pronouncements, and/or they insert cowrie shells in their ears to facilitate reception of spirit messages. They might diagnose a demanding ancestor, a violated taboo, spirit possession or witchcraft.

By the 1980s all diviners were likely to be called *banchape*, except for those who divined through possession, but the term generally referred to a detector and cleanser of witches. By that time those who consulted a diviner usually expected a diagnosis of witchcraft since many no longer considered the spirits of the dead as closely implicated in what happened to them, and so to explain misfortune they looked elsewhere. In carrying out a search for the witchcraft tools of a suspected

witch, *banchape* worked with several male assistants who entered granaries and houses to discover hidden objects (Colson 2000). These were spoken of simply as helpers.

Healers

Herbalists and other healers who manipulate the body, work under the guidance of ancestral spirits, as do diviners, but they are called *musilisi* (from *kusilika*, “to treat”, “to heal”) and only rarely *mung’anga*. Some, of course, combine healing with divination. A few such people are widely recognized for their skills, and their homesteads need to accommodate patients who may come from a considerable distance and stay for weeks.

Church Officials

Terms derived from mission teaching include *mufundisi* for missionary. This may be derived from the verb *kufunda* (“to teach”): that in turn may derive from a more ancient borrowing of *fundi*, “learned person”, found on the East African coast. The term “evangelist” has been adopted into ci-Tonga as *evangeli*. Priests and nuns, including the few who are Tonga-speakers, are referred to by the English terms “Father” and “Sister”. “Minister” and “Pastor” are uncommon, reflecting the fact that this role until perhaps the late 1970s was filled by expatriate male missionaries. Tonga terms have not been created for the leadership roles played by local men and women who officiate in village churches.

Witches

Balozi, “witches”, are those suspected of gaining illegitimate advantage through the use of charms or medicines (*musamu*, and more rarely *masalamuzi* or *bwanga*), i.e. the power inherent in plants and powerful animals and human substances. They practice **bulozi**, witchcraft, whether they operate through captive spirits, or created familiars in animal form, or use charms or poison including vegetable poison from the bush, battery acid and today pesticides. The term derives from the proto-Bantu form **-dogi* (Vansina 1990:299). English speakers translate *mulozi* as either “witch” or “sorcerer” though “witch” is the more common usage, but the *mulozi* has no inherited witchcraft substance and must acquire witchcraft power deliberately (See Chapter Four).

The Manifestation of Spirit

Table II summarizes the Tonga vocabulary for spirit forces.

TABLE II	
Type of Spirit	Tonga Term
Breath, Animating Force	<i>Muuya</i>
Creator	<i>Leza</i>
Spirit affecting Natural Forces	<i>Basangu, or Baami bamvula</i>
Spirit of Dead Protector of Kin	<i>Muzimo</i>
Ghost	<i>Celo or Zilube</i>
Ghost of Unhappy Dead	<i>Ibbandwa</i>
Invading Spirit causing Personal Illness	<i>Masabe</i>

Muuya

Tonga religious symbols refer primarily to actions, and spirits too are identified primarily through their actions, that is, through their effects on the human world. Any category of spirit can be said to be *muuya*, a term also used for air, breath, or the life force of humans and animals. Today it is used as a synonym for “soul”. But people also say that spirits are *muuya* while living humans and animals have *muuya*. A child is born with *muuya*. Scudder was told in 1957, at Mazulu Village in Gwembe Central, that the *muuya* comes from *Leza* and returns to *Leza* after death, but Mazulu at that time was close to Chabbuboma Mission and this may reflect its teaching. Elsewhere people maintained that they did not know where the *muuya* of a child came from.

The concept of *muuya* held in the 1940s and 1950s did not equate with the concept of a generalized power such as Tempels (1959:33ff), Zahan (1979) and Zuesse (1970) have identified as central to the religious ideology of Bantu-speakers, subsuming all power inherent in living forms and in streams, pools, cliffs, and large rocks. *Muuya* is more specific. It carries the implications of breath and movement. Neither plants nor natural features are thought to possess it, although *basangu* are thought to be associated with some places which serve as natural shrines.

Plants are said to have *bwaanga*, sometimes translated as medicine or charm, a form of power that acts directly upon other matter, compels

events, and is manipulated rather than appealed to. Large trees, especially hollow baobabs and fig trees, are said to shelter *basangu* and *mizimo* spirits and are treated with respect for that reason, but people sometimes speak and act as though such trees have some kind of inherent spiritual force of their own. The man who fells a tree to make a canoe or drum ought first to make an offering at the base.

My questions were brushed off when I asked if the offering was directed to some force within the tree, to the *basangu* associated with the area, or to the *muzimo* that had called the man to become a canoe or drum maker. As with much ritual, people said you did it because this is what you must do when you fell such a tree. Those appealing for rain at deep pools, springs, or rock faces, said to be sites (*malende*) of spiritual power, directed their appeal to *basangu*, but they rarely addressed them by name, and it may be that their own sense was that some spiritual force existed at the place itself. Direct questioning again brought the response that neither plants nor pools nor rock faces had *muuya*, though they might be said to have *inguzu*, translated as “force” or “power”.

The concept of *muuya* delimits a realm of spirit including the spirit associated with a living human being. I have been told of men who used medicine to hide their *muuya* in a tree or other material object to safeguard it against attack by witches, only to lose their lives when the tree or object was somehow destroyed. This was the death divination on several men I knew. During life a person's *muuya* may leave the body and travel about, and this is thought to explain some dream experiences, and in sleep one is also able to receive visits from various kinds of spirits which show themselves or perhaps only speak to the dreamer. Dreams of all kinds are studied for their meaning, because dreams apprise one of what is happening or has recently happened elsewhere or what may happen in the near future. Dreams in which spirits, including those of dead kin, appear are especially powerful and the dreamer must be careful how he or she understands such a dream. During sleep, the *muuya* is therefore vulnerable to detachment from the body. Some forms of witchcraft are thought to work through draining the victim's *muuya* to increase that of the witch, or the victim's *muuya* may be taken at night to work in the fields or other enterprises of the attacking witch. *Muuya* of the living is therefore something like

an animating force or vitality, capable of leaving the body which it normally animates and having experiences as pure spirit. On death, a person's *muuya* leaves the body for good, and henceforth acts only as a form of unembodied spirit.

Despite the fact that the dead appear in dreams, people usually say that no one can know what a spirit looks like, and that one knows what kind of spirit is active only through knowledge of its effects, for spirits are an invisible force like wind (*luwo*), and wind is a common metaphor for any kind of spirit. Commonly I have been told, "Spirits are like wind. We do not see wind. We only feel the motion and see the movement of clouds, trees, grasses, and water. In the same way it is through experience that we know that spirits exist." I heard this in the 1940s and 1950s and continued to hear it at the beginning of the twenty-first century, although admittedly usually from older men and women.

It is the particular kind of experience that allows one to know which mode of spirit is active, though this may need to be confirmed through divination. Then one knows the appropriate response. On occasion a spirit may enter a human or an animal, but this does not mean that one has seen the spirit. One has only seen the vehicle which in no way approximates the spirit or conforms to its essential nature, although the belief that *basangu* spirits may appear in snake or lion form is a statement recognizing that such spirits are powerful and potentially dangerous and associated with the bush. It is also true that people are inconsistent, for they speak of having seen dead relatives or *basangu* spirits in dreams and they interpret this as a sign that such spirits are trying to communicate with them.

Characteristically, spiritual forces were not represented in material form. Even at the present time I have found most Tonga disinterested in the Christian symbols of the cross or in statues or paintings depicting Christ, the Virgin Mary, and the saints venerated in the Catholic Church. This disinterest in imagery contrasts strongly with the use of effigies and the appearance of masked dancers representing different spirits during transition and curing rituals by many western Zambians, and their neighbours in Angola and the Congo (DeCraemer, Vansina and Fox 1976:469; Gluckman 1949; Turner 1967; 1968, 1969; Wastiau 2000; and Pritchett 2001).

The Tonga are concerned with what spirit does rather than with the form of spirit. They commonly recognize five broad modes of spirit activity: *Leza*, now frequently translated as God; *basangu* (*musangu*, singular), which includes spirits affecting communities of people and therefore closely associated with appeals for rain or other communal concerns; *muzimu* (*mizimo*, pl.), ancestral spirit or shade; *celo* (*zelo*, pl.) or *cilube* (*zilube*, pl.), dangerous ghost; and *masabe*, alien spirits or essences that cause illness through possession.

Leza

The Tonga share with other Africans the recognition of a creator spirit rarely implicated in what is happening in the present. They refer to that creator as *Leza*, a term also found among the Bemba-speaking people of Northern Province and undoubtedly of some antiquity among this branch of Bantu-speakers. Ehret traces the term back to about 1000 BC and a group he calls the Sabi-Botatwe people who occupied the area around the middle of the Lualaba River and were ancestral to both the Bemba and the Tonga. The term, he says, derives from a verb meaning “to nourish” and he sees this as revealing “a shift away from the older concept of a distant Creator” to a view of “God as a more active and supportive force in human life” (2002:196). The Tonga certainly spoke of *Leza* as creator, or as Hopgood says, “A Great First Cause” (1950:62), but many did not regard *Leza* as a force to be invoked as a personal helper or even as a protector of communities. No shrines were dedicated to *Leza*, and only in later years did I hear invocations at communal shrines ask the spirits addressed to intervene with *Leza*. On the other hand, events which are considered inexplicable were and are referred to *Leza*. Speaking of a barren woman, someone said, “*Leza* laughed”. On another occasion, after various appeals to the ancestors failed, someone commented with a shrug, “What else but *Leza*?” The birth of triplets, a man’s sterility, a woman’s barrenness, a continued history of miscarriage, a man’s deafness, all were attributed to *Leza*, by one or another, for *Leza* was the great unknowable. But, in the past the major role of *Leza* was that of sole creator of the permanent nature of things, including human society. Only *Leza* could create (*kupenda*, or *kulenga*): people could alter the shape of things as in carving, molding pots, weaving, but it was *Leza* who made the materials they used.

In ciTonga, *Leza* is a proper noun and the category has a single representative, thought of both as always existing and as the creator of everything else. The noun, like any personal name, takes no nominal prefix. This makes it unique among nouns referring to spirit, but adjectival and verbal prefixes used in speaking of *Leza* are associated with singular nouns of the *mulba* class. Oddly enough, although courtesy requires the use of the plural in speaking of or to respected persons and *basangu* spirits, the polite plural is not used in speaking of *Leza*. If a plural form is used, one is immediately in another frame of discourse.

Baleza connotes a plurality of spirits, carries implications of malevolent action, and is interchangeable with terms such as *zilube*, *zelo*, and *zimpuku* which would never be associated with *Leza* because they cause only trouble. The form *maleza* is used primarily in contexts of divination or reporting a divination, especially a divination of the cause of death, and means something like “the bad news”. In this context, *maleza* can best be translated as “the affairs of the spirits” and no more refers to *Leza* than does *baleza*, since divinations even now rarely implicate *Leza* as the source of death or other misfortune. Until Christians taught otherwise, *Leza* was regarded as too remote from human affairs to be involved. Adjectival and verbal prefixes used in conjunction with *Leza* indicate that *Leza* is classified with humans and large animals, all of which are believed capable of acting unpredictably under their own volition, whereas such things as rocks, trees, rain, and soil act according to their nature (Colson 2004).

Basangu

Spirits affecting the forces of nature are multiple, may have names, and have different origins. In speaking of a manifestation of such a spirit, Plateau Tonga in the 1940s and 1950s used both the singular form, *musangu*, and the polite plural, *basangu*. The term appears to be derived from the verb *kusanguna*, “to begin”, “to initiate”. If so, it is appropriate to the role given to *basangu* as initiators of new forms of community behavior. In so initiating they differ from *mizimo*, or ancestral spirits, who are thought to demand a continuity of behavior, and, indeed, are said to punish their dependents for innovation. *Basangu* mediums may announce that a spirit is angry when humans

make innovations on their own initiative, as by selling crops or building rectangular houses, but they also may call for some innovation, especially in ritual.

Basangu is used both for a spirit and its human vehicle. In Gwembe Central in the 1950s and 1960s, only the polite plural was used. In Gwembe South, prior to the 1980s, people spoke rather of *baami bamvula* ("chiefs of the rain") or *mondolo* (Weinrich 1977:77-90; Reynolds and Cousins 1995:205; Spierenburg 2000). There I first heard *basangu* used in general conversation and during rituals only in the 1980s when prophets began to be possessed by spirits associated with cults then spreading through Tonga-country in which the roles of *basangu* and *masabe* spirits afflicting individuals coalesced. *Mondolo* is derived from the Shona *mondhoro*, translated by Gelfand (1962:5-50) as "tribal spirits". Gwembe Tonga also use *mondolo* to refer to the conus shell, more usually called *impande*, once associated with chieftainship over much of this region of Africa. In the 1990s Ute Luig found *basimpande* in use as a synonym for *basangu* in Gwembe South (Luig 1998:299). *Mondolo* is also a euphemism for lion, another metaphor for power and rule.

For purposes of explication, I have chosen to use *basangu* as the term for the category of spirits that people appeal to at *malende* shrines, regard as implicated in community affairs, and seek to consult through men and women who enter into trance and speak as vehicles for messages that concern them all. The category includes many spirits of various origins.

Some *basangu*, especially those associated with natural features, may be simply projections of the forces of nature, and I am not sure that these are identified by individual names. The majority are said to be spirits of previous earth priests or former spirit mediums or other community leaders, who continue to be concerned with the community's welfare. In this guise they figure as *basangu*, whereas when they are involved with their kin they act as *mizimo*. They are appealed to at community shrines where people gather, especially for appeals for rain. But usage is changing and some now use *mizimo* instead of *basangu* for the spirits associated with community shrines or use the terms interchangeably (Katowa 2002:41ff; Gwembe diaries). *Basangu* are also consulted through men and women mediums who demonstrate that they have been chosen as a *basangu's* vehicle by going into trance,

speaking in tongues, or displaying other identifying behavior. During consultations they are addressed as their invading spirits. These may be *basangu* associated with local shrines or alien spirits about whose origin people may speculate. At several seances, a possessing *basangu* was identified as a recently dead medium or political figure resident elsewhere, or as a spirit known to possess a respected medium active in another area. Some political figures and some mediums, therefore, appear to be viewed as acting as *basangu* after death, but the majority continue to exist only as *mizimo*. When people make appeals for rain at the grave site of a former medium, as they now do at the grave of Tomu Musanu of Musulumba Village, who died in 1982, it is difficult to know whether they are appealing to the medium's own spirit as a new *basangu* or to the *basangu* that once spoke through him or her. Probably for the most part it does not matter, for people are appealing for help in hope of assistance from whatever power there is.

Basangu address communities, yet they are free to move through space and time, associating themselves now with one region and now with another, and their mediums may also move. *Basangu* visit and consult one another, and a given medium or prophet may be entered by a number of *basangu*, some of which may appear only once or twice as when a medium announces the arrival of a visiting *basangu* who has a special message for the people. Mediums may cease to be entered and say that their bodies are now cool, meaning that they are no longer visited by *basangu*. *Basangu* associated with local shrines and their vehicles may also become discredited if the rains fail or they fail to ward off other disasters. Then communities may send delegations to consult a medium who lives elsewhere to find what is expected of them.

Basangu are unlike *Leza* in that they are multiple. They deal directly with humans. They have mediums and some have shrines. They are inside time since they have an origin and they may vanish. Until recently what has been constant is the existence of the category whose members, like the representatives of the human category, may be ephemeral, but while they are in existence can answer human appeals.

Mizimo and Zelo

The categories of *mizimo* and *zelo* refer to spirits of the dead. New members of the categories regularly come into existence as the living

die and their *muuya* enters the world of spirit. At the same time the long dead are being forgotten, and become irrelevant to the living who place themselves under the protection of the spirits of those whom they themselves remember.

Mizimo (*muzimo*, sing.) is derived from the proto-Bantu *zimu* or *dimu*, according to Janzen (1992:95), or *dimo*, according to Vansina (1990:297) who says the primary meaning is “spirit of a dead person” or “ancestral spirit”. Tonga associate the term with *ku-zima* which may be translated as “to vanish” or “to be extinguished”, for it is used of a fire that goes out. Death commonly is reported as *wazimuna*, i.e., “he/she vanished completely”. Another term sometimes used in speaking of them collectively is *basikazwa*, “those who have left”, from the verb *ku-zwa*, “to leave” which carries the same connotation. Tonga usage indicates that *muzimo* can be translated appropriately either as ancestral spirit or shade, although it should be remembered that the ancestors include former members of one’s lineage as well as direct ancestors. *Mizimo* is used when people speak of the spirits of the dead as directly concerned with the affairs of their own kin, i.e. their direct descendants, members of their matrilineage or descendants of men of their matrilineage. The ghost of a dead child may afflict its parents or other kin, but I do not remember hearing it said that the *muzimo* of a dead child has afflicted either parents or other senior kin, but this may be possible. In the 1990s an elderly woman made an offering to the *muzimo* of her dead daughter who had died several years earlier at the same time that she offered to the *mizimo* of her own parents.

Much of Tonga religion in the past was concerned with the relationship between the living and “those who have vanished”. In their benevolent aspect, which means that a recognized kinship relationship exists with the living, they are *mizimo*. The form *cizimo* is used when no such relationship is assumed, and therefore the spirit can have only evil intent. Then it is not a ministering protective force but a dangerous power released into the cosmos. In that guise it is more likely to be called *celo* (*zelo*, pl.), whose root I cannot identify, or *zilube*. The latter is from the verb *ku-luba*, “to forget”, and is always used in the plural form. I translate all three terms as ghost, and they appear to be synonyms. *Celo* was the common term on the Plateau and in the hills, *zilube* on the Zambezi Plains, and *cizimo* was a less common

usage in both areas. *Ibbandwa* when used implies that the ghost is particularly malevolent. It is sometimes said to originate in someone who was killed without cause, usually by witchcraft, and therefore seeks revenge upon the living, but in practice the term also may be used when illness is attributed to a dead spouse angered because the widow or widower was not properly cleansed of its death. It then turns on the surviving spouse. Under the term *zimpuka* are lumped together ghosts or malevolent dead, a witch's creatures, insect pests, and dangerous creatures such as crocodiles and snakes. In the 1940s and 1950s I was told that *mizimo* did not possess people but that *zelo* did, and when this happened they were to be expelled through the use of fumigation and other medicines. On the other hand, it is the *muzimo* that is ritually attached to a living member of the lineage during the final stages of a funeral when the spirit is being summoned back in its new role.

In the 1940s and 1950s I asked many people about how the *muuya* of a living person became transformed at death into *muzimo* and *celo*. Some thought the *muuya* differentiated after death, giving rise to two different entities. Others implied that the terms reflected different aspects of the relationship of the dead to the living (Colson 1960:122-151; Colson 1962:1-65; Weinrich 1977:77-78), and some thought that when people no longer remembered and called upon the dead by name, then the spirit ceased to act as a *muzimo* and became only dangerous to the living and so became *celo*.

It would be simplistic to think of *mizimo* and *zelo* or *zilube* as simple projections of the good and evil aspects of human nature which become separated after death. I do not think that people consider *zelo* as anything but troublesome, but *zelo* may be causing trouble because they have been captured and made to do the work of a witch. On the other hand people are ambivalent about *mizimo* which are frequently seen as the source of misery given their sensitivity to any infringement of their prerogatives. Reference to them as *baleza* reflects this.

"The *muzimo* is something that causes suffering and so we offer." It is also quick to take offence, especially if it feels slighted by its inheritor or demeaned by some action. This is illustrated by this extract from a diary, Musulumba Village, September 1998:

When they had a divination they were told (that the illness) was due to *masabe* and to the *muzimo* of her mother which is in the bush. ...The inheritor slept with a man in the bush... The elders say the *muzimo* is in the bush and now they are quarrelling in their lineage.
(Benard Simalabali).

Other actions too will drive it to the bush, where it becomes malevolent and causes trouble.

Masabe

Masabe refers to an invading power or force that makes its victim ill until mollified by the performance of a dance drama in which the victim acts out the wishes of the invading spirit and comes to terms with it and is thereby cured. The term is obviously cognate with the Shona *mashave* which Gelfand (1962:84-105) translates as "alien or patronal spirits". When Tonga use the prefix *ma-* in speaking of people, they are stressing their alien character and the term has derogatory implications. The first *masabe* possessions were probably introduced by migrants returning from Shona country or by Shona who took refuge across the border in Tonga country.

Not all Tonga use *masabe* in the general sense in which I use it here. Some say *masabe* refers to only the earliest manifestations of such possession which arrived in the 1910s, and they refer to subsequent forms of possession by their specific names. But through the 1950s, *masabe* was commonly used as I am using it here, for the various possession dances then known. Since the 1960s, new forms of possession are less likely to be considered *masabe* as they have been evolving towards permanent cults with a hierarchy of adepts.

Masabe, like *basangu* and *zelo*, can take over and speak through human vehicles. They also resemble some *basangu* in that they are defined as a force or essence originating outside the familiar human community, but they do not seem to represent former living persons. They are like possessing *zelo*, and unlike *basangu*, in that they have no message for the community. The *basangu* medium or prophet is entered because the community needs to be alerted to possible dangers or instructed to make an offering or carry out some ritual, or because

the community requests the medium to become a channel for communication with the spirit. The *basangu* medium may initially be made ill, but this is to force him or her to accept the role of medium. Possession by *zelo* or *masabe* also causes illness but *zelo* want only to injure the victim and must be expelled through fumigation and other treatment. *Masabe* have desires which are made manifest through their victims and are pacified through a dance performance in which the victim enacts these desires. Each kind of *masabe* has its own appropriate rhythms, songs, dances and medicines. The dance drama that treats the one possessed allows the spirit to indicate its nature and obtain what it desires (Colson 1969 and 1977; Ute Luig 1999; Weinrich 1977:91-94). The performance brings together all possessed by that particular form of *masabe* to support the new victim as she (and more rarely he) expresses the nature of the possessing force, which may be a railway train, airplane, soldiers, ballroom dance, angels, Japanese, cannibal, or a species of animal. *Masabe* are thus similar to the spirit forces involved in various "cults of affliction" (Turner 1957:52ff) common throughout much of Africa. These include the *zar* possession found in Ethiopia and the Sudan (Lewis 1971: Beattie and Middleton 1969; Kramer 1993) and the healing cults of Central and Southern Africa which Janzen (1992) brings together under the term *Ngoma*, 'Drum'.

In the 1940s, Plateau Tonga spoke of *masabe* as becoming a thing of the past, while in Gwembe Valley in the 1950s it was looked upon as something that affected women but not men, who were sophisticated in the ways of the outside world. I was assured that *masabe* treatment would never take place in town though performances were frequent in the Valley. From the 1960s through the early 1980s, *masabe* performances acquired new salience among the Tonga, as apparently happened elsewhere in Zambia including the cities. Ter Haar, who describes the exorcism rites carried out by Archbishop Milingo in the 1970s, ascribes the growth of spirit possession and rising fears of witchcraft to the pressures associated with social crisis (1992:226). Comparable trends were characteristic throughout Southern Africa (van Dijk et al. 2000). The period was certainly one of rapid change throughout Southern Province, but perhaps particularly so in Gwembe Valley, the majority of whose people were resettled in 1958. If possession indicates social crisis, the crisis continues, for each time I return to Southern

Province, I have learned of new forms of *masabe* recently arrived, and performances have become more and more elaborated. Forms of *masabe* possession that I first learned about in 1992 included Malia, said to have been learned from the Goba of Gwembe North who were first entered about 1972. The possessing spirit was identified as Malia, the mother of Jesus.

The Ambiguity of Spirit

Linguistic evidence indicates that in Tonga thought one form of spirit merges into another. Category boundaries also shift over time. Contextually, people make distinctions overridden when other interests are dominant, and not all recognize the same distinctions, witness the following excerpt from my 1957 field notes recording a conversation with Cibilika Crie and Sweater Mukwenga, two young men who grew up at the same time in Chezia, a Gwembe Central neighbourhood.

I instanced the difficulties I have in understanding how they use the terms *baleza*, *basangu*, *mizimo*, *zelo*, *zimpuka*. Cibilika said that one would use *baleza* in speaking of the findings of a divination but then go on to say that the *mizimo* want beer. He thought one ought to use *basangu* only when speaking of the *basangu* of rain, but sometimes people used *basangu* as a synonym for *zilube* or you could say *zimpuka*. *Zilube* are the spirits of any dead and they may come and enter you. Then you become ill and when you are treated by fumigation, the *zilube* come out and you shout out their names. So it is known that it is *zilube* that are bothering you. While people are fumigating you, they also beat on iron to make a noise to drive out the *zilube*.

Mukwenga said *zilube* are spirits of your own relatives who are angry with you and make you ill to remind you of your obligations to them. When they come out of you, you shout "I am so and so", perhaps mentioning your mother's mother, saying "I have come because this person is not all right." But if it is a spirit of a non-relative then it is only a *celo*. The *zelo* of other dead people can be sent to your house by a witch (*mulozi*). Suppose you sit in your house with witches around you. Then the witch who is angered only thinks and the *zelo* he controls comes to your house

to urinate on your possessions and this makes you ill. *Zilube* are not sent by anyone. They come by themselves.

Cibilika does not accept this distinction nor does he believe that *zilube* are spirits of one's own dead. He says that strong-smelling soap is protection against them and that before a new-born child is brought out from the house it is bathed with a strong-smelling soap to protect it against the *zilube* which are hovering around.

Mukwenga said that long ago one would call a herbalist who knew medicine against *zilube* and he would fumigate the child. Today they rely rather on strong-smelling soap which makes the *zilube* move back. These precautions are taken specifically against *zilube* rather than against *zelo*. The latter are called *zimpuka* here.

Chibilika said they also fear *zimbandwa*. These are spirits of the dead who have been killed and are angry at their death. Their spirits come back and try to kill people but are most likely to try to kill the relatives of their murderers.

From many such conversations and observation on numerous occasions, I have concluded that so long as people can agree on what needs to be done on particular occasions, they are free to have different interpretations of what lies behind the visible symptoms and need not verbalize or confront their differences. The categories of spirit, such as they are, give a rough sorting of experience which enables people to decide upon appropriate action. Diviners and mediums, including *basangu* prophets, seem no more concerned than other Tonga with formal definitions or precise terminology. However, I have never developed the sustained relationship with a diviner or medium that might lead to an intensive examination of concepts and a refinement of definitions. Instead I have tried to understand concepts of spirit, along with other aspects of Tonga religious life, through watching and listening as people interacted on secular and ritual occasions and then asking them about the terms used and what they think they did and what they think happened as a result.

While spirit concepts are ambiguous and vary from individual to individual, all appear to agree that humans and some other living

things have *muuya* which after death survives and may manifest itself in various ways but becomes like other forces which may have never existed save as *muuya*. The ambiguity, and the merging of one category with another situationally, has made it possible for all, save *Leza*, to become merged under Christian teaching into a single category known as “demons” or “evil spirits”, English terms now firmly entrenched within the Tonga vocabulary. The fact that they were known through their intervention, and that intervention was usually seen as a disruption in what was regarded as normal or desirable made the fusing together of all save *Leza* as “evil spirits” all the easier. With them is now joined a new spiritual force known as “Satan”, who works through demons or evil spirits and witches and is a counterpart to *Leza* reinterpreted as the Christian “God”, who otherwise as an active force would be called upon to bear the brunt of the unhappiness caused by all that goes wrong during a human life. Nevertheless, many feel uneasy at the denial of the past, as witness the following excerpt from my field notes:

June 21, 1996, Musulumba Village.

Sitting with my 31 year old hostess who considers herself a good Catholic. As we talk she said that Satan is very powerful and she links Satan with witchcraft. I asked if the idea of Satan is something new here or if they have always had it. She said, “I think myself that it is because we aren’t keeping the old rules that kept things right. We girls were not supposed to eat eggs or other things and there were other rules. So the country was good. Then we forgot. Then the Christians are against the old ways so the evil that was there and was kept down by the rules is free and is loose. So Satan has increased in these days.”

CHAPTER IV

**THE VOCABULARY OF SHRINE
AND SUBSTANCE**

Shrines as Places of Appeal and Offering

The Tonga, like most of the other peoples of Southern Africa (Zahan 1979:19-20), did not build temples, their Shona-speaking neighbours being the rare exception (Mbiti 1970:95). Zahan suggested a number of possible reasons for their absence, including both a climate that made a shelter against the elements unnecessary when people gathered for public rituals and an unwillingness of shifting cultivators to expend effort on building when they knew they would move on. But temples have been built by other tropical and sub-tropical shifting cultivators. Zahan also suggests that where descent groups, such as clans and lineages, provide the basic ordering of society, places of worship are multiplied and this "diminishes their distinctiveness". On these terms the ancient Romans should have built no temples, and it contradicts what we know of the importance of rivalry in the building of bigger and more imposing structures. He further suggests that temples are unlikely to be built if ritual calendars are based on the rhythm of the seasons and the succession of natural events rather than the cycles of development of a human or divine being. Yet Muslims build great mosques with the same devotion that inspires Christians and Buddhists to build their temples. Zahan may be closer to the mark when he attributes the absence of temples to an unwillingness to be cut off from nature at the moment of appeal. This is a matter of dogma in some recent African churches, such as that of John Maranke who forbade his followers to build temples or take shelter under cover when they gather for worship (Jules-Rosette 1975:35). When Tonga appeal for rain, they indicate that the participants' exposure to the sun is essential: it guarantees the truth of their cry of suffering. With their feet on the earth, they study the sky for signs of rain, while they appeal to *basangu* spirits roaming the bush. In contrast, offerings to the dead as *mizimo*, in their role of protectors of their kin, usually take place within the enclosed space of the dwelling house.

Despite the lack of imposing structures, certain sites are regarded as appropriate for an approach to spiritual entities. These I refer to as "shrines". The Tonga had no generic term to cover all such places. Their terms for specific types of shrines are summarized in Table III. Shrines may be natural sites associated with power, or tiny hut-like structures built either at the grave sites of former leaders or in the

courtyard of the homes of *basangu* mediums, or a symbolic gate built within a homestead, the upright post of a hunter's shrine, or the doorway of a dwelling house. Built shrines are never elaborate. Many are ephemeral flimsy structures that may vanish from one year to the next. When necessary, they can be rebuilt within the space of a few hours.

Table III.		
Shrine Type and Spirit Category		<i>Tonga Term</i>
Community or Territorial Shrine	<i>Basangu</i>	<i>Malende</i> or <i>Kokalia</i>
Place of Power	<i>Basangu</i>	<i>Malende</i>
Land Shrine	<i>Basangu</i>	<i>Malende</i>
Hut shrine	<i>Basangu</i>	<i>Kaanda</i>
Lineage Shrine	<i>Mizimo</i>	<i>Cilyango</i>
Personal Shrine of <i>Basangu</i> Medium	<i>Basangu</i>	<i>Kaanda</i>
Hunting Shrine	<i>Mizimo</i>	<i>Idomba</i> , or <i>Lwaanga</i>
House as Place of Offering	<i>Mizimo</i>	<i>Inganda</i>

Community or territorial shrines were places of appeal to *basangu*. *Leza* had no shrines until missionaries instituted the building of churches in the early twentieth century where *Leza* was called upon as *God*. Thereafter such buildings proliferated. By the end of the century, any one Tonga neighbourhood housed one or more such structures, but they served dogmatic rather than territorial communities.

Territorial Shrines

Rituals serving the interlinked kindreds who occupy a common territory (*cisi*, pl. *masi*) take place at territorial shrines, at sites referred to as *malende* or *kokalia*. The latter term I have heard only in Gwembe Valley. It may be a borrowing from neighbouring Shona-speakers (Garbett 1977) or from Chikunda of the lower Zambezi (Isaacman and Peterson 2003). Some *malende* are natural sites. Others are at grave sites or the sites of former homesteads. All serve communities bound together by their dependence upon the land and the natural forces of the area they occupy.

I have called *Malende* associated with natural sites, places of power. They are places regarded as inherently sacred because they

are associated with unseen powers existing in nature. Sites may be rock faces, springs, deep pools or large hollow trees (Colson 1997). Here neighbourhood representatives make appeal in times of stress, especially in drought years. They say they go to ask *basangu* for help, but rarely address the *basangu* by name, nor do they elaborate on the nature of the power they sense at the site.

I have called the second type of *malende* land shrines (Colson, 1997), for they represent the neighbourhood as a place of human settlement whose earlier inhabitants had come to terms with the land, and they are served by earth priests. Some land shrines where appeals were made in the 1940s and 1950s were already sacred in the nineteenth century, but none are firmly dated. No Plateau or Gwembe shrine, so far as I know, has been studied by archaeologists. Gonde, the site associated with the grave of Monze Mayaba, the medium of the *basangu* Monze, goes back to about 1880 if it represents the burial site of the Monze who was visited by Livingstone in the 1850s, whose village then was located some miles east of the present Gonde (Livingstone 1857:554).

Land shrines usually are marked by one or more small shelters in the form of a small or even a miniature hut (*kaanda*, “tiny house”, *tuan-da*, pl). Most are too small to be entered. The *kaanda* represents the house of the original forerunner of the current earth priest. While Places of Power engage with the forces of undomesticated nature, a *kaanda* shrine symbolizes the initiation of the area’s human occupation and its existence as a community. Here the spirits summoned are those either of first settlers or former *basangu* prophets who initiated the rituals that continue to link the existing community to the spirits of the place. In the past each neighbourhood had at least one land shrine where people gathered, especially in times of drought or to seek protection from epidemics and other communal threats. The shrine, i.e., the *kaanda* and the area immediately associated with it, was treated as sacred ground, where trees should not be cut nor thatch or other produce gathered. No one, including the earth priest and his ritual wife, was licensed to visit the place privately. Doing so was tantamount to a claim to witchcraft.

The *kaanda*, at even the most celebrated land shrine symbolizes a dwelling but is not used as such. Even the spirits associated with the shrine are not thought to dwell there permanently and it may fall into

disrepair and vanish between one year and the next. Furniture usually consists of a hoe blade (*ijaamba*) and a clay water pot (*inongo*). These may be metaphors for food and water, the essentials of life, as the *kaanda* itself is a metaphor for the house occupied by a married couple, but no Tonga has ever told me this. No attempt is made to provide the *kaanda* with aesthetic visual or tactile qualities. The thrust of daily life and common experience inform the activities on which attention is focused, and these refer to the ends desired (Kalilombe 1999:132). What the shrine signifies is familiar to everyone gathered there. It needs no further exegesis.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, land shrines continue to be visited and new ones are created which may better represent the present population distribution. In 2003, I was shown a newly instituted shrine on the western Plateau, said to mark the grave site of a woman *basangu* prophet who had died a few years earlier. Increasingly, however, the importance of both land shrines and places of power has diminished. They no longer seem to have a major role as ritual centres associated with the agricultural year or other subsistence activities. When people are summoned to a shrine, usually for an appeal for rain, few appear. Shrines that continue to be visited by large numbers are those associated with the political role of hereditary chieftaincy in contemporary Zambia, or they have come to symbolize the common identity of all Tonga-speakers. Gonde is such a shrine (O'Brien and O'Brien 1996). Signs on the highway alert the traveller to its location and give the date of the annual *Lwiindi* ceremony held during the dry season when travel is easy. Although Gonde still functions as a land shrine for those in its immediate vicinity in times of drought, the dry-season gathering celebrates the Tonga as an ethnic polity within Zambia (The Post, July 8, 2004).

By the 1940s, many Plateau land shrines had already disappeared. Early missionaries accompanied converts to destroy them by cutting down their trees and smashing the *kaanda*. Some shrines were abandoned in the 1920s when their associated communities were displaced from land preempted for European farms. Some continued to be visited, however, when farmers permitted or encouraged displaced people to return to carry out appeals for rain in drought years, and I heard of visits taking place in 2004. Abandoned shrines were also

memorialized in legends that describe how farmers and/or bereft communities suffered misfortune when a shrine was violated.

Plateau shrines which were spared such onslaughts still lost adherents because they failed the test of Tonga pragmatism. Their efficacy was put in question when Christian converts refused to participate in communal rituals and ignored associated taboos, trusting in the protection of missionaries and colonial officials if they faced community discipline for endangering everyone. The rain fell on their fields as on the fields of the faithful. Others then saw no reason to join an appeal for rain or to pace their cultivation to allow the earth priest and his ritual wife to initiate each activity. Instead they planted when they thought the time was ripe, ate the first fruits without waiting upon the earth priest, and harvested at their own time (Machila 1990).

In Gwembe Valley, less under mission influence and distant from colonial officers who were seldom visible, *malende* shrines suffered no comparable attacks until 1958 when Kariba Dam was built on the Zambezi River and the formation of Kariba Lake forced the resettlement of the majority of its people (Colson 1971). Land shrines linked to displaced communities were bulldozed during bush clearance or left to be flooded as the lake rose. Colonial officers thought to reassure people by encouraging the spirits associated with such shrines to accompany them to the new areas. They arranged to have poles from dismantled *kaanda* dragged behind lorries carrying people to their new sites, to leave a trail for the spirits to follow. Those resettled were not reassured, and in the early years of resettlement none of these shrines were reestablished.

People thought this pointless. They said the *basangu* associated with their shrines were either powerless or had lost interest in helping people: the proof was that they had been unable or unwilling to prevent the move despite the expectations of their intervention voiced in 1956-1957. Pragmatically, no effort was wasted in appealing to spirits who either could not or would not help. Recreating such shrines also met with opposition from the existing inhabitants of the regions into which the displaced were moved. These had their own land shrines that signalled their priority of settlement and so their relationship with the *basangu* associated with that territory. Any attempt to install new land shrines, therefore, was interpreted as an infringement on the existing social order.

Some of those resettled were prepared to try the efficacy of their hosts' land shrines and joined their appeals for rain. In the 1960s, Musulumba villagers, moved from the hills of Gwembe Central to Lusitu in Gwembe North, reported joining appeals for rain at shrines belonging to Shona-speaking Goba neighbours (Lancaster 1977, 1981). Some Sinafala villagers, when moved from the Zambezi Plain into the hills of Gwembe Central, joined rain appeals at a land shrine in Koma, a nearby hill neighbourhood. Some Siameja villagers, moved from the Zambezi Plain into the hills of Gwembe South, joined appeals at a land shrine in nearby Nyanga. Many of the resettled simply said it was pointless now to look to *basangu* and *malende*, that these had been left behind at the river, and some said they were glad to be relieved of the old taboos which had prevented them from cultivating when and how they wished. But some of their initial reaction was due to a feeling of insecurity in an area that they did not know.

A few of the destroyed land shrines were reestablished in the mid-1960s after people began to feel at home in their new areas, just as some of the *basangu* mediums active in the old area again found themselves possessed (Ute Luig 1998:299). But, forty years after resettlement, reinstituted shrines had never regained their old repute, and many shrines had never been rebuilt. Their very nature as territorial shrines worked against this. So did the experiences of those they are meant to serve. During the years when the *malende* were in abeyance, people saw that the rains came and crops grew. They also heard weather reports on radios, now present in most villages. This left them sceptical that the weather was due to purely local actions when drought affected most of the country and even surrounding regions.

Scepticism was also encouraged by increasing exposure to Christianity and Western education. After resettlement, more neighbourhoods had schools, and schools began to give children a full primary education. Some were also sent on to secondary schools (Scudder and Colson, 1980). Until the mid-1960s, when missions handed control of schools to the government, this exposed children to mission teaching and taught them that *basangu*, and ancestor spirits, were either non-existent or forces of the devil and that attendance at land shrines and places of power was demon worship. They were instructed to refuse to take part in "heathen" activities (Colson 1970).

Basangu mediums were also less active in the years immediately following resettlement. They did not rebuild personal *kaanda* shrines until the mid-1960s. Some never again claimed possession, saying that *basangu* no longer entered them. Mediums may have shared the general loss of faith when their possessing spirits failed to protect the community against removal, but I think they also suffered initially from the loss of the weather predictors that had informed them in their old areas. Those moved from Gwembe Central to Lusitu in Gwembe North found themselves in a region of lower rainfall. Even those moved from the Zambezi Plain into the hills of Gwembe Central or Gwembe South, encountered a different topography and a different flora. While Tonga credit *basangu* spirits with the ability to range freely and communicate with one another, mediums are expected to advise people on what threatens them locally and on what should be done about this. Unless they can do so, they are dismissed as fraudulent. It was in the mid-1960s, when people had learned their way about their new terrain, had named its features, and felt at home, that some former earth priests chose sites for their land shrines and former mediums were again visited by *basangu*. New mediums also announced themselves, and some had *kaanda* built within their homesteads where people came for consultation with the *basangu* that possessed them.

By then, however, such shrines were outnumbered by *kaanda* structures built for men and women who claimed possession by invasive *masabe* spirits. Among these were *mangelo* ("angels"), who possessed many throughout Tonga country in the 1960s and early 1970s. Rituals treating such possession catered to the individual sense of malaise characteristic of the early 1960s, but some *mangelo* mediums were also instructed to build a *kaanda* shrine for a possessing spirit which they identified as a form of *basangu*. Some *mangelo* who claimed to work as *basangu* mediums in a quest for rain, also served as healers and diviners for a diverse clientele, including temporary visitors from a considerable distance. In 1978 I visited a then famous *mangelo*, formerly of Gwembe Central, who had moved to the Plateau near a railway hamlet. In addition to houses for himself and his wives, his homestead contained buildings he called his hospital and his dispensary and three *kaanda* shrines associated with three different spirits that used him as a vehicle. Clients present during my visit included men and women drawn to

him from as far away as the Copperbelt.

Through the 1980s shrines associated with new spirit cults continued to proliferate: in 2003 I saw a newly built one in a Plateau village. Nevertheless, it is my impression that throughout Tonga-speaking country, such shrines became less important in the 1990s when many sought solace in the healing services of burgeoning charismatic churches, some of which were initiated by local men and women.

By then, people had a choice among many possible channels of appeal for rain or other benefits. In March 1994, for instance, the people of Musulumba thought about attending appeals for rain at two different land shrines serving their Shona-speaking neighbours; rebuilt a *kaanda* at the grave of Tomu Musanu, a former *basangu* prophet; and marched in procession from the local Catholic church to a place at the Lusitu River where, together with the priest, they prayed to God for rain. A few people participated in all three rituals, some chose among them, and some went to none.

Lineage, Household and Personal Shrines

I use “shrine” to refer both to *malende* and to places of offering where the dead are appealed to as guardians of lineages and the homesteads and households occupied by their kin, and as sources of professional skills of individual kin.

Lineage Shrines

Cilyango (‘of the doorway’), which I translate as spirit gate, is the shrine that represents both lineage and homestead, except in Mwemba Chieftaincy in Gwembe South where I saw no such shrines in 1957 and elders denied that they had ever built them. By the 1940s, spirit gates were also absent from Plateau villages under strong mission influence, but were common elsewhere, though not every lineage claimed the right to build one.

A gate is built by an individual, almost always a man, who is either the spirit heir of a previous builder or someone who has been informed through divination that an ancestor who once built one wants it to be reactivated. A new gate, at least in fiction, is a revival of one built by an earlier member of the lineage or more rarely by the builder’s grandfather. Though the responsibility of an individual, it

pertains to a lineage and to its *lutundu*, the group comprised of descendants of the men of the lineage. A gate usually consists of three upright stakes set in a parallel line; these are taken from a tree whose shoots root themselves. The stakes are linked at the top by entwined withes to form two entries. Symbolically the gate is the door (*mulyango*) to the homestead conceived of as an ancestral dwelling. It stands detached before the houses of the builder and transforms the cleared ground of the homestead, together with its dwellings, into space protected by the guardian *mizimo*.

Each evening the owner of the gate, or a deputy in his absence, closes the entry by thrusting two poles across the openings to hold the guardian *mizimo* within the homestead and shut out other forces. In the morning the poles are removed to allow the spirits to exit, just as the living inhabitants of the homestead begin to move into the wider space that surrounds the homestead. Residents of the homestead gather around the gate to offer and eat the first of the new grain. It was also the site of an annual offering calling for collective ancestral blessing on members of the builder's lineage and its descendants, though such gatherings are now rare.

On the death of the builder, the lineage member chosen as inheritor or guardian of his spirit inherits the obligation to build the gate, which ultimately should be recreated at his own homestead. When a homestead moves or its owner dies, the living trees of the gate remain standing long after the site otherwise has become indistinguishable from the bush, but offerings are no longer poured beside it. Those for whom it had meaning are now elsewhere. The gate is rebuilt at the new site, but usually only when and if a divination reports that the *muzimo* demands its revival.

While *malende* shrines were not easily transferable to new areas at the time of the Gwembe Resettlement in 1958, spirit gates were soon rebuilt on the instruction of diviners who assured people that the ancestors had followed them to their new homes. Most gates then built were replacements for ones destroyed when old homesteads were bulldozed or burned or left to the flood, but a few were identified as revivals of long forgotten originals. But their power, like that of the *malende*, was seen as diminished after the move. Builders no longer summoned lineage members and descendants of lineage males for the

annual offering. When I asked why the gatherings were no longer held, some said frequent drought years left them short of the grain for the beer and food needed for such a gathering. Others cited the waning importance of lineage and clan under contemporary conditions, or the loss of faith in the power of ancestors to help or punish. Even so, despite the inroads of Christianity, in the 1980s and 1990s, divinations still attributed illness or other ills to failure to build a gate, and a few have been built even in villages regarded as largely Christian when people have been desperate for a cure. They take a chance that the divination is correct, but may not be surprised when the subsequent offering fails of its purpose.

Diary, Gwembe North, December 17, 1993.

SK died in the evening having been ill for a long time. When they had a divination with a diviner who uses divining bones, they found it was the *muzimo* of the grandfather who bore his mother who wanted a gate built. They built a gate for SK but he did not become better. They drummed and they made an offering to the *muzimo* but nothing cured him and today he died.

(Christopher Nkiwani)

Personal Shrines

Personal shrines were built by hunters at the instigation of an ancestor (*muzimo*) who also endowed the hunter with a particular hunting skill, such as the use of the pit-fall. Although fishing was of considerable importance along the Zambezi and Kafue Rivers, I neither saw nor heard of any shrines built by fishermen. When I asked about fishing ritual in 1949 while in Gwembe Central, I was told that fishermen did not receive their skill from *mizimo* and did not build shrines. They depended on medicines for luck (*colwe*). B. Reynolds, however, was told in 1957 that specialist fishermen, who were always men, were like other specialists selected by the *mizimo*. But he also found specialist fishing associated with little ritual (1968:54).

Some hunters had several shrines, each associated with a different technique and a different ancestral sponsor. The shrine usually took the form of a spear rest (called *lwaanga* or *loombwa*) placed beside the house of the owner's senior wife. It consists of a shoot of *muntiokela*

(*Commiphora* sp.), a tree whose shoots reroot themselves. On it are displayed the horns, and sometimes pelts, of the hunter's kill, and a gourd ladle for pouring offerings. In Gwembe North neighbourhoods, where Shona influence is strong, the shrine (there known as *madiose*), often takes the form of one or two small huts rather than a spear rest (B. Reynolds 1968:23-25). One such was also built in a Gwembe Central neighbourhood in the 1970s by a man whose ancestors came from Shona territory. All hunting shrines I have seen stood in the hunter's homestead, although I have been told that hunting shrines are also built in the bush. The hunter invokes his spirit sponsor at the shrine before hunting, and afterwards gives thanks there for a good outcome.

Although all special skills were once considered to be callings empowered by an ancestor, only hunters (and some *basangu* mediums) built personal shrines. The rationale may be that hunters practiced their skills distant from the homestead and the domestic space guarded by the ancestors, but luck in hunting was also seen to be at the cost of the well-being of members of the homestead (see Chapter Five). Carvers (with the exception of canoe makers), diviners, basket makers, potters, and smiths, all of whom also carried on their crafts at the bidding of a *muzimo*, worked within the homestead. Iron-smelting, though archaeologically attested for the area, had not been practiced within the memory of anyone I met even in the 1940s, and I know nothing of any shrines associated with smelting.

Neither I nor Barry Reynolds saw hunting shrines in Gwembe South in 1957 where elders denied that they had existed in the area (B. Reynolds 1968:25), but Scudder saw one in a hill village there in 1963. By the 1940s, game had disappeared from many Plateau neighbourhoods and few men hunted, but I saw hunting shrines in Plateau villages near the escarpment and in villages near the Kafue flats where hunting still took place. In the 1950s, hunting shrines were common in Gwembe Central (Scudder 1962:191) and in Gwembe North (B. Reynolds 1968:26). After 1958, they became even more numerous in resettled Gwembe Central villages, whether these moved into their own hinterland or to Gwembe North, for people found themselves in areas rich in game. Since the 1970s, game has become rare throughout Gwembe, but hunting shrines were still being installed in 2000 when I saw recently initiated hunting shrines in resettled villages in Gwembe North.

The House as Shrine

Land shrines, spirit gates, and the personal shrines of *basangu* mediums and hunters have a referent in the doorway of the dwelling house (*inganda*). The doorway, or the dwelling to which it gives entry, is the shrine associated with daily life. In Gwembe South, this is underlined, for here, although people frequently sleep in the *igazi*, a structure built on stilts that serves both as granary and lounging place, it is at the doorway of the house that offerings are poured. It is the mundane life associated with the house which gives meaning to all other shrines save the *malende* places of power associated with the wild.

It was in front of the doorway that burial, at least of those past early infancy, once took place, and sometimes still does. This means that it is a place intimately associated with the spirits of the dead. The doorway of the house is also the common place of offerings to spirits of the dead as *mizimo*, who are asked to preserve life, give health and prosperity to their descendants and members of their lineage, and to stay their anger against those who have offended them. Because *mizimo* are thought to hover about the doorway, sitting or lingering there is forbidden as this blocks their free movement. The doorway is also linked to individual life and continuity through descent, for the navel cords of those born within the house were once buried beside the doorpost. In Gwembe Valley, at least, people saw themselves as having a permanent link with the burial place of their navel cord even though the house might have long been abandoned and the site become field or bush.

Shrines and the Sacred

Permanent sacredness inheres only in *malende*, both places of power and land shrines. These are approached only in company and with ritual precautions. During most of the year they are avoided although their associated spirits are assumed to be free to move, and it is not necessary to keep the *kaanda* of a land shrine in repair. Repairs are made or a new *kaanda* built only when people again assemble at the site.

Shrines standing within the homestead are treated with respect on ritual occasions, and otherwise fade into familiar background. Spirit gates and hunting shrines become convenient places on which to hang

domestic utensils. People pass freely through the doorways of houses, reminded of the presence of the spirits only by the prohibition against sitting in the doorway or otherwise obstructing the free passage of the spirits. The *kaanda* in the yard of a *basangu* medium may be used by children in play. Such structures apparently have no power in themselves and become sacred only through the activity of appeal that relates humans and spirits. It is the spirit, not the shrine, which has power, and spirit is bound to no particular place.

Understanding how the Tonga interact with shrines requires a recognition that they are primarily concerned with spirits and a relationship to spirits rather than with charms, images, or shrines as embodiments of spirit. They are casual about shrines, but they are also casual about rituals. These have a general rather than a specific form. Rituals need a place to be enacted because they are public and people must come together for them. Shrines, even the hunter's shrine, are places of assembly. Spirits are asked to attend, and to hear what the living need of them. The invoked power can be dangerous, and so people should be circumspect while at the shrine. At other times, shrines are reminders that people enter into relationships with spirit forces in different ways and for different purposes. They point to individuals who have a special relationship with identifiable spirits, and they symbolize human continuity as each shrine is a memorial to a successful partnership between spirit forces and individuals or communities.

Gender Symbolism, Shrines and Ritual

For the most part, shrines are not overtly gender-linked. Freudians would find the post-like form of the hunter's shrine and the womb-like space behind the doorway representative of universal human imagery. The Tonga have made no such explicit interpretations.

I have only once encountered a woman who had a hunter's shrine, and she claimed that she would hand it on to her son when he was old enough to hunt. Women, however, collaborate in offering at such shrines, for the hunter summons a woman of his lineage to assist him. She hands him the gourd ladle from which he pours the offering. Women have built spirit gates, though this is unusual and the woman may say she is serving only until a suitable male is available. Again, women are involved in offerings at spirit gates, for the owner offers in

conjunction with a senior woman of his lineage. Women *basangu* mediums, like male mediums, may have a personal *kaanda*. Since mediums are individuals chosen by the *basangu*, they are consulted as individuals rather than as representatives of lineages, and they offer at their personal shrines in the presence of others but without summoning assistance.

In Gwembe Valley, the land shrine usually is associated with the primal pair who settled the area, and their living representatives work together in the rituals held there. On the Plateau, land shrines may be associated with anyone who once served the community (whether as big man or woman or medium or first settler) and so must have known how to deal with the spirits of the land. The spirits appealed to may be of males or females, though I think the majority of shrines are associated with males. Nevertheless, both men and women work at the shrines, in their building, in the provision of the communion meal, and in the appeals for help.

Gender symbolism is most apparent with respect to the house as shrine, and is most obvious on the Plateau. In daily life, Plateau people were more casual about a gender allocation of work than was true of Gwembe Valley, but they were much more likely to use gender associations in organizing rituals. The Plateau wife poured her offerings either at the center post of the house or at the bedposts while the doorposts were reserved for offerings poured by the husband, who was said to be the owner of the house (*inganda*) composed of his wife and her children. If the wife died, he lost his house. Widows and divorcees were owners of their houses and poured at the doorposts until they took a new husband. The association of right with male and left with female, so common elsewhere (Needham 1973), also served to organize Plateau ritual. The doorposts represented the two lineages intimately involved with the creation of the husband through the union of his father and his mother. The right hand post received offerings to the spirits of his father's line, the left hand post those to spirits of his own lineage. If his wife died, the left hand doorpost was burned on her funeral fire, and the house itself was abandoned with the end of mourning. The right hand post was burned when the husband died, but the house continued to be occupied and the widow inherited by a member of his lineage. Right arm and hand were associated with the

father's side, the left with the matrilineage. This featured in Plateau naming rituals and other rites of passage associated with puberty, marriage, and death. Each child receives a name from its father's side and from its mother's side, and these are represented by wristlets placed on the right and left arm respectively. Right/left also organized the spatial layout of the homestead, for the house of the senior wife, which is dedicated to the spirit of the husband's father, is placed to the right of the second house, dedicated to spirits of his matrilineage. It is to the house of the senior wife that a man should first come on every return from a distant trip. It is there that he should die.

While people of the Gwembe Hills, like their Plateau neighbours, stress the right/left association with gender, residents of the Zambezi Plain are inclined to ignore it. Men and women alike pour offerings over the doorsill, irrespective of the line of descent being recognized (Colson 1960:51). Children usually receive one ancestral name, the first that of an ancestor of the father, while the second is named for a member of its lineage, and so it goes alternately down a line of children. Not surprisingly, given Tonga disinterest in exegesis, I have not been able to elicit an explanation for these differences. I have thought of various possible explanations. The Zambezi people oriented themselves to the river, giving directions "to the hills", "to the river", rather than emphasizing west and east or right and left. Their communities were less mobile and less subject to fragmentation, given that the fertile alluvial soils of the Zambezi Plain stabilized lineages in well-populated neighbourhoods where representatives of kinship roles were usually present and quick to state their claims on individuals. The people of the Plateau and hills, on the other hand, were shifting cultivators who lived in scattered homesteads or small villages that also moved frequently. They may have felt a need for a symbolic ordering that patterned place and social relationships wherever they might move.

The Ritual of Offering

Ritual objects associated with shrines are drawn from the repertory of daily life. They include the gourd ladle (*lufulo*) used in offering beer or water. In form it is identical with ladles used for other purposes, but once used in offering it is reserved for this purpose. It is kept tucked in the thatch of the roof, close above the doorway of the house,

or on the upright of the spirit gate or hunter's shrine. Beer, the most common offering to ancestors, is symbolically rich, for in one medium it combines imagery of grain grown in the family field, fire associated with the household hearth where it is brewed, and water given by rain on which life depends. It should be brewed from grain grown by the one who offers or for whom the offering is made, and be brewed by the wife attached to the house of offering (Colson and Scudder 1988:60ff), or by a woman of his lineage if offered by a hunter. It comes from the labour of those who offer and is intimately associated with their life force. At least this was true until the 1980s, when even beer for offering began to be made with purchased grain or meal.

An offering, however, has further connotations: it is a form of communion, associating those who offer with both spiritual forces and human companions. This is true whether the offering is made with beer or an animal has been sacrificed. All present should share, although this may be only symbolically, by touching beer spilt at the place of offering or a bit of cooked meat kept for the purpose. Thus, those who should, but are unable to attend at the time, may still participate. This is called *kuluma* ("to bite") and is said to be equivalent to sharing the meal. Beer left after the offering to the spirits is shared with other members of the community. The first to receive either has the status of "grandchild" (*mushukulu*) or is a member of a clan linked through *bujwanyina* to the clan of the one who offers. *Bujwanyina* is a clan joking relationship. On many occasions, it is members of the joking clans who represent the community at large in relation to those who are the focus of an action (Colson 1953). When beer began to be sold in Gwembe Valley in the 1950s, beer made for offerings continued to be distributed to friends and neighbors. Only as beer became defined primarily as a commodity, did this expectation begin to be ignored. By the 1980s, one pot might be kept for distribution and the rest sold, but by then even beer made for offering was usually made from purchased grain.

Beer is the only substance, other than water and meal, offered at the doorway of a house. The house as shrine is not a site of blood sacrifice. At the spirit gate, a chicken, or rarely a goat, may be slaughtered and blood as well as beer poured over the uprights. In the communion meal that follows, those attending share the meat of the sacrifice. At a

hunting shrine, a chicken is usually killed when the hunter asks for assistance before a hunt, and a portion of the kill is brought to the shrine after a successful hunt before distribution. At *malende*, chickens, goats, and cattle are slaughtered.

While cattle, small stock, and chickens are killed on various other occasions, this is to provide food for living guests rather than attending spirits. This is true even at funerals when stock must be killed, unless the funeral be that of a baby who dies before cutting its first tooth. The father or a member of the father's lineage has the obligation and right to kill on the first day, while a representative of the dead person's lineage kills on the following day. The dead person is said to desire that stock be slaughtered as a mark of respect, particularly if he or she owned stock, but the meat also feeds those attending the funeral and the importance of a funeral is signalled by the number of animals killed. Slaughtering takes place near the stock pen or on the outskirts of the homestead without invocation as far as I know. Tonga of the hills and Plateau, who seclude girls at puberty and celebrate their emergence, slaughter cattle and other stock during the ceremony which announces the girl's readiness for marriage and draws many visitors. These animals are killed at the edge of the homestead.

Nothing should be killed in ritual celebration of the harvest (*lwiindi lwakutebula*), for blood is taboo on this occasion; instead each ritually recognized household once made beer to offer to the *mizimo* and share with neighbours. At the *lwiindi lwakumwaka*, associated with planting and the desire for rain, and on other occasions when chickens, goats or cattle are offered at *malende*, only black animals are killed, for sacrifice is usually associated with prayers for rain. Black explicitly symbolizes the dark rain clouds. The sacrificial animal should be provided by either the earth priest or a member of his lineage, unless someone is made to atone for an offense against the shrine or ritual cycle by supplying an animal to be slaughtered. When a neighbourhood (*cisi*, *masi* plural) must be purified in the rite of *ingolomokwa* because a stranger has died on its soil, or the rite of *lulowa* because blood (*bulowa*) has been shed through a homicide, the offering is usually a black goat or cow. It is brought in the one case by the stranger's kin, in the other by the slayer or his kin; and it is slaughtered either at the land shrine or in the homestead of the earth priest. If *lulowa* were not carried out, people

said, there would be no rain: the offering was made with the words 'You can see they have killed this goat/cow. We have purified you. *Basangu*, we want rain'.

I have asked why sacrifice is appropriate at other shrines but not at the doorway. The usual response is that beer and water are offered at the doorway, and that animals are killed at other shrines in addition to the offering of beer. This is typical of responses to most questions asking for explanation. My own suggestions as to possible symbolic meaning usually meet with the response, "Well, perhaps, but the old people never told us this." Nevertheless, I think it suggestive that the offering of beer at the doorway once was followed, and still is in Gwembe South, by an offering of water when the spirits are asked "to be cool as water is cool", i.e., to have no anger. In some contexts Tonga associate heat with blood. But I have also been told that water is used because if they used only beer, then the spirits would get drunk and be fierce: "So we use water to cool them so they are mild." Countering this argument is the fact that spirits summoned at a gate, where blood is shed, are also ancestors and in Gwembe South, both ancestral and *basangu* spirits are propitiated so that they will be cool and so beneficent.

I have also speculated that the association of the house with a woman and her children has connotations that may make a blood offering inappropriate. As previously noted, a woman and her children may be referred to as a house (*inganda*), while the husband is the owner or guardian of the house (*singanda* or *ulanganda*). I have been told that women do not slaughter animals "because they give birth". There is thus an explicit contrast between birth and death, between blood associated with fecundity and blood associated with death. Nevertheless, in the 1990s, in all three regions of Gwembe, people responded to my queries about the association of women with the spilling of blood by saying that of course a woman may slaughter a chicken to feed a guest. Some said that the reason women do not slaughter goats or cattle is because men know how and women do not. All agreed that it is for men to slaughter.

Finally, I note that spirits summoned to the spirit gate, hunter's shrine, or *malende* are being summoned as guests, and guests if possible are provided with a meal for which the host slaughters his or her stock. Those summoned to the *malende* are referred to explicitly as

strangers or guests (*beenzu*). A spirit gate is the site of a mass offering invoking many spirits associated with the lineage who are usually at the periphery of thought and therefore in a sense strangers. The spirit invoked at the hunter's shrine is one identified in this context as a former hunter, one familiar with the bush away from the human domicile, who now summons its chosen vehicle to leave the homestead to become a hunter. In a sense, spirits associated with hunting shrines are outsiders to the homestead. But the spirits summoned at the doorway are thought of as common frequenters of the homestead. They are not strangers. They are provided with beer, the appropriate gift to associates whom one wants to honour.

Ritualized Objects

Other items that are used in ritual contexts and carry symbolic meaning include tools and ornaments. Hoe blades, which should be of African manufacture are placed, face down on the floor of a *kaanda* with flange or "heart" hidden, to be reversed during an appeal for rain. Some claim that the reversal happens without human intervention. The hoe (*ijaamba*) is the primary tool of cultivation and is symbolically associated with the female who undertakes so much of the work of cultivation, as spear (*isumo*) and axe (*kabanga* or *keembe*) are associated with the male who hunts and clears bush. But it should be noted that a man gives his bride a spear blade on their marriage which she uses thereafter as a knife, and I have seen women using axes to chop down trees in field clearance while men regularly cultivate with hoes, though less so since ploughs and harrows have been introduced.

Hoes of African manufacture once were highly valued as essential agricultural tools. In the 1940s they still were valued on the Plateau where such a hoe was included in the bridewealth payments that initiated a new household and perpetuated descent groups. By that time Gwembe Tonga, who looked to labour migration rather than agriculture for a cash income, had converted that portion of bridewealth to a money payment. Throughout Tonga country, elders said that one hoe was the price of a male slave in the 1890s, four the price of a woman. This was because women brought their fecundity as well as their labour to their owners. The single hoe of bridewealth indicated that while the husband and his kin obtained possession of the woman's labour, her fertility

remained with her own lineage. The hoe installed at a *malende* continues to be both an implicit reminder of the crucial importance of agriculture and matrilineal descent and an implicit plea for good rains on which agriculture depends.

Colour has ritual significance, though the Tonga do not have as developed a colour code as has been reported elsewhere (Jacobson-Widding 1979). Black (*busia*) is explicitly associated with the desired rain clouds and with blessing. The black cloth brought to a *malende* by petitioners for rain, is cut into strips, and used to secure the thatch of the *kaanda* roof. *Basangu* mediums, consulted during droughts, may ask for black cloth and also receive wristlets of black or dark blue beads (*bulungu busia*). If rains are heavy and people are anxious to have relief so that they can work in their fields, they bring the medium white beads, symbolizing the white clouds that carry no rain. Those associated with different cults of affliction wear wristlets of appropriately colored beads, black, dark blue, and white being preferred.

But color symbolism is ambiguous, dependent upon context. White (*butuba*), although now regarded as a sign of purity in possession cults such as *bungelengele*, was associated with sorrow and filth as well as drought and sunshine. Mourners daubed themselves with white clay or ashes during the early stages of a funeral and these were used also on occasions when people abased themselves before *basangu*. Those going to appeal at *malende* might rub their faces with white clay, indicating their pitiable state and their dependence upon the spirits, and they cried out that they were humble and in need. I have also heard of people calling themselves *mutuba*, meaning that they were poor, without possessions.

Various connotations for red (*busubila*) include lightning and fire, blood, anger, ferocity and warfare, but also life, vitality, and fertility. The red feathers of the *induba* (a *lourie*) were worn by the man who had killed a lion or a fellow human in battle. Nothing red should be brought either to the *malende* or near a possessed medium for fear of lightning. Fire should not be used when a *basangu* medium was being consulted. Inconsistently, fire can and must be brought to the *malende*, because the communal meal is cooked at the shrine. The Chewa of Malawi, who share some of the Tonga symbolism, show greater consistency in banning all fire at shrines where appeal is made for rain (Schoffeleers 2000:14).

While red symbolizes danger and ferocity, it also symbolizes life. Plateau and hills girls during puberty seclusion were, and are, rubbed with red ochre (*lusila*). This beautifies them and symbolizes the desired fecundity. On the Zambezi, where girls were not secluded, red ochre was still associated with youth and beauty. As a favourite cosmetic, it was used lavishly on gala occasions, but was forbidden to those under death pollution. In other contexts, red ochre celebrated continuity. Near the end of a funeral, when the spirit of the dead is recognized as a *muzimo* and given a living guardian who inherits the status of the dead, the inheritor is marked at the throat with red ochre while the spirit is told, "Sit here. Do not say that you have been abandoned." A Gwembe South inheritor also receives a wristlet of red beads: this represents the spirit and is transferred in turn to each new inheritor. If accidentally destroyed, it must be replaced.

Plants are used both symbolically, as in marking various stages of a funeral, and are thought to have curative and other powers. But plant symbolism, like other material ritual vocabulary, is minimal in comparison with that reported for the Ndembu Lunda (V. Turner 1967; Pritchett 2001), the Balovale (Wastiau 2000), and various populations in the Congo (Jacobson-Widding 1979). The Tonga indeed seem to be averse to using a multiplicity of symbols whose mutual reverberations might deflect the mind from the specific purpose on which ritual focuses. Those they do use refer to the essentials of human existence: rain and water, fire, household, cultivation, health, sexuality, birth, death. These continue to be vital concerns for Tonga living in rural areas, and some at least continue to reverberate with town dwellers who no longer live from agriculture.

Invocation and Material Symbol

Tonga rituals involve a public statement of appropriate relationships between the living and forces which are thought of as powerful, but potentially both helpful and dangerous. I think it is this public quality which in the past differentiated a religious action from witchcraft or sorcery, though the Christian emphasis upon private prayer abolishes the distinction.

In religious action, the relationship with spirit is inherently public even though the action takes place only in the thoughts of individuals.

Conceptually a distinction is made between what can be publicly acknowledged because there is no intent to cause harm, and the hidden activities of the witch who acts solely for personal gain or from malice, without regard for the public good or the good of others. Religion incorporates the good life and serves as a model for what is acceptable for humans to attain.

Approach to shrines, including offerings at the doorway or within a house, is a public avowal of intent. Secret approach is associated with evil intent. An act of invocation should have a witness. The act always has an element of offering which is accompanied by a verbal statement in which the one who offers explains what is desired. The request may include a request for protection from human enemies, but these are not named, nor are the spirits asked to favour the invoker and his or her dependents over other people. Spirits are asked to benefit, not to exalt. Invocation stresses the desire to live in an upright fashion, at least implicitly, and the spirits are asked to reciprocate by extending their protection. "We live as you would wish us to live. We have not forgotten you. Help us now. Do not be angry." This is the tenor of invocations I have heard voiced at doorways, spirit gates, and *malende*. Invocations therefore ask for a blessing and for benefits that cannot harm others.

Christianity and its Symbols

Christianity which increasingly dominates Tonga religious life, in rural areas and in towns, has introduced new symbols, not all of which have become grounded in the realities of local life. The necessity of a built structure to symbolize the community of worshipers has been accepted by all but the followers of John Maranke, and everywhere fairly substantial buildings now house congregations which gather within them for regular services. Where a single neighbourhood once gathered at common *malende*, the various church structures symbolize the existence of distinct groups of worshipers. And the very structure of a church differentiates it from *malende* and other shrines, for it is aligned to focus on the altar or the pulpit rather than on the doorway and it separates those gathered within from the natural world associated with daily life. Congregations sit on benches rather than on the earth as is customary when consulting *basangu*, and they face in one direction.

Those officiating instruct others on how they should live, citing biblical precedent, rather than calling upon the spirits to recognize that people are living as instructed by their elders, following the ways of their immediate forebears.

While the Catholic Church, following the Second Vatican Council, has tried to incorporate local symbols and local music in its services, other churches rely primarily upon the artifacts of a European Christianity, not all of which appear to have found local favour. The Bible is much used, including for divination, and is frequently quoted. Some take what they read as gospel truth. The cross, while evident in some churches, appears to be banned by Seventh Day Adventists and some Born Again Christians. I have heard few of any church members talk of the cross or expatiate upon its meaning. Baptism is a common ritual. Some Christians take communion, but despite the importance of shared beer or food at *malende* or in household or lineage rituals, communion does not appear to be regarded by most people as an essential Christian ritual, nor does it seem to link them to one another. Catholics may own rosaries, sometimes used as amulets or curative charms rather than as accompaniments of prayer. Representations of saints, the Virgin Mary, or Jesus Christ, are rare nor do they seem the focus of special devotion among Catholics. Conversational references to saints or the Virgin Mary became more common in the 1990s even though statues of the saints and the Virgin have become less pivotal in Catholic ritual since Vatican II. Gwembe Christians, of whatever denomination, rarely referred to Jesus Christ until the late 1990s, despite his healing role which strikes deep to the roots of major concerns and anxiety. Christianity for many appears to mean a reliance upon divinity, summed up in English by the word “God” and in ciTonga by *Leza* who seems to have become personified, at least verbally, in a new fashion (Colson 2004a). In the 1990s, *Leza* began to be referred to as “father” (*tata*) or “chief” (*mwami*), gender becoming important due to guidance from missions and the use of the English language with its built in grammatical gender. To *Leza* or God, people now appeal for health, prosperity, fertility, and a good life. They may also ask forgiveness of sin, a new concept which I have had difficulty getting explicated.

Few now pay attention to the old ritual cycle of the agricultural year. Many deny the credibility of *basangu* spirits, though appeals for

rain are still made at some *malende* both on the Plateau and in Gwembe Valley. Large-scale gatherings at *malende*, such as that at Gonde associated with the Monze chieftaincy, appear to be assertions of a Tonga ethnic community rather than occasions of religious communion. The spirits of the dead continue to be important to many, although they may be referred to as “demons”, using the English word, and it is only devout Christians who refuse to permit the inheritance of the spirit or deny that the dead continue to have a role in the lives of lineage mates and their descendants.

CHAPTER V

HOMESTEAD AND BUSH

A Symbolic Dialectic

Although the Tonga once depended upon the bush for much food and many essential materials, as many Gwembe Tonga still do, it is the homestead that is associated with the known and the human. This is true despite the fact that rural houses are used principally for sleeping and storage; other activities usually take place in the open. It was the cleared space around the homestead structures (consisting of houses, granaries, drying platforms and stock pens) that was linked to ideas about human life, and it was this area that was thought to be preeminently under human control. Its surface is cleared of vegetation so that bare earth forms the floor on which domestic life takes place.

Munzi (*minzi*, plural) is used both for a single large homestead and for the collectivity of homesteads that form a village. An isolated homestead composed of but one or two huts would probably not be considered a *munzi*. Those who live in such isolated dwellings are said to live in *matungu*, a term also applied to a field shelter. The area of habitations, fields, and bush used by a population which pays homage to a common land shrine or set of land shrines under the leadership of an earth priest is a *cisi* (*masi*, plural). As such it is considered a bounded unit in harmony with its human occupants. If one speaks of *cisi*, one is thinking of territory linked to people.

Contrasting with village and homestead is *cisaka* or *isokwe*, which English-speaking Tonga translate as “bush” or “forest”. The term *nyika* is sometimes used in the same sense but more commonly carries the meaning of country or today the planet. It is the term used by school children for a terrestrial globe.

The dichotomy between village and bush is a standard motif throughout this region of Africa, but it may carry different meanings. Morris (1998:124-125) describes the people of Malawi as associating bush with game, with men defined as hunters, with affines (for on marriage men settle in the villages of their wives), and with the dead for the dead are buried in the bush. The last two associations would never occur to Tonga-speakers. On marriage, Tonga women usually moved to join their husbands. Men were defined as cultivators as well as hunters and provided both grain and meat to the larder. And the dead were, and often are, buried in the homestead, except for children born with anomalies (said to be bush creatures), lepers and suicides.

Their bodies were thrown into the bush. Ghosts and the spirits of the unmourned adult dead who died away from home are associated with the bush. The final act of mourning invites the new spirit as *muzimo* back into the homestead.

Among Tonga-speakers, bush carried connotations of wilderness and of absence of human control, although humans convert bush into fields or homestead sites, burn it to provide better pasture for cattle or for hunting, cut trees for building materials and tools, and gather its plants for food and medicines. Bush is the habitat of *basangu* and ghosts (*zelo*) as well as game. Herd-boys sometimes report being showered with stones or clods of earth, attributed to *basangu*. They then need to be fumigated to drive off the spirit, for while people seek out *basangu* at *malende* and through their mediums, in other contexts they fear contact with them.

People are intimately acquainted with the bush surrounding their homesteads and neither fear nor hesitate to use it. At the same time, it is not human domain in the same way as *munzi*. Until recently it harboured very real dangers, and this can still be true in parts of Gwembe Valley. Prior to their poisoning in 1964, packs of hyenas roamed Gwembe villages at night, killing small stock and attacking unpenned cattle. Leopards and lions attacked stock and sometimes people. Chief Chona died after being attacked by a lion in 1951. Elephants were a constant threat to fields and a danger to those who tried to drive them off. A Gwembe Central man, in whose homestead I had stayed, was torn to pieces in 1978 when he tried to drive elephant from his field. In 2000, invading elephant from Zimbabwe killed a woman and a boy in Gwembe North and laid waste many fields, though people drummed through the night to try and drive them off. Elephant damage was commonly reported each year thereafter.

In consequence, bush is still an ambivalent metaphor, for while it harbours much good, it also stands for matter out of human control, danger and evil. It also stands for illicit activities. Children born of an affair are called “children of the bush”. And, as previously said, the bodies of children born with certain physical anomalies and adults who were rejected by human society were once disposed of by throwing them away in the bush.

Medicines and charms, whether for protection or witchcraft, are primarily associated with the bush, although perhaps the most powerful medicines for witchcraft are human body substances. These, of course, originate in the homestead or village, while other witchcraft medicines are said to be activated by the spirits of a witch's victims, especially those of kin. Other substances used for witchcraft come from the bush: lion's fat, leopard's claws, crocodile claws or flesh, various plants, etc. Plants may be used either to heal or kill.

Senior men and women usually protect themselves and their dependents from the attack of witches by obtaining protective charms, but it is conceivable to the Tonga that a person may have a good life, prospering in children, stock, and fields, without any resort to charms or medicines. Those dissatisfied with that modicum of good which should be the common lot are seen as needing to enlist additional power. Because they are thought to gain only if others lose, in a classic example of what Foster (1960) has called "the idea of limited good", the use of such charms opens them to accusations of witchcraft, for they mobilize power stemming from outside the village to attack those within it. Once such power was derived from the bush or acquired from distant strangers. Now frequently enough it is purchased from those who live in cities, which for some may have come to symbolize the uncontrolled wilderness of the contemporary world.

Animals and the Wild

Animals are associated with both village and bush. Admittedly all are *banyama*, but domestic animals (cattle, sheep, goats, dogs and today, pigs and donkeys) are more commonly referred to as *lubono*, wealth: they are property. While they mostly feed from the bush, they live in the homestead. Other animals live in the bush, but are killed and their meat brought to the homestead to sustain it.

Like all else, animals were created by *Leza* who gave them their form and nature. They feature in two myths, among the very few I have ever been given. In 1957, Tom Musanu, a *basangu* medium in Musulumba Village, then in Gwembe Central, said that *Leza* began by moulding clay into small animals, wearied of this and used the remaining clay to make a few large animals, making sure that each animal had some distinctive and beautifying mark. Thus, the zebra who

got no horns was given stripes instead. Musanu also said that it was forbidden (*cilatonda*) to kill any animal just to kill – one could kill for use or because an animal was dangerous and about to attack, but otherwise it was wrong to take the life (*buumi*) of animals, just as it is wrong to take the life of humans.

Each clan is associated with one or more species of animals and sometimes other phenomena, though not in the kind of totemic relationship reported from elsewhere in the world. Clan animals may belong either to the homestead or to the bush. Characteristics of the species are attributed to members of the clan and are played upon by joking partners and in praise names and slogans shouted out at funerals and other public occasions. The Bahyamba clan, for instance, is associated with the hyena, rhinoceros, pig, ant and fish; the Bakonka are associated with eland in some regions and with jackal in others and also with zebra and rain; the Bachindu are associated with lion and chicken (Colson 1953). According to a Plateau elder with whom I talked in 1947, people and animals were created together in the sky as clan associates and came to earth together, proof of this being the footprints still to be seen in a rock surface on the western Plateau.

The association once reminded people that humans and animals may be metaphorically one. But it is difficult to tease out the ritual implications. Totem animals were not sacralized, at least not during the twentieth century whatever may once have been the case. Clans do not carry out rituals for the well-being of their animal totems, nor do members think of themselves as having power over clan animal totems. Hunters kill and people eat their clan totems, though this may be a recent development and reflect Tonga pragmatism, for if some ate and there were no ill consequences, others would also disregard such taboos (Colson et al. 1991:38). In 1957, some elderly Baleya in Gwembe South refused to eat goat, the animal associated with the Baleya clan throughout Tonga-speaking territory, nor would they use goat skins. Other Baleya said they had tried goat meat, nothing happened, and they had stopped observing the taboo. Those who continued to avoid said it was because of *cikolo* (*zikolo*, pl, from *ku-kola*, to poison, to intoxicate), a term which covers the avoidance of any substance which may make one ill, and in some instances probably involves an allergic reaction given the associated symptoms. Some avoidances were said to have

started when an ancestor was poisoned through the food, others said it had started with themselves either because of witchcraft or because of personal medicines. Many could not eat chicken, goat, sheep, or beef, or some game animal. Others could not eat honey or certain vegetables. The taboo might be hereditary or personal.

The dichotomous categories of domestic and bush as applied to animals is neither hard nor fast. Domestic animals conceivably can become animals of the bush, just as humans might. Gwembe children used to sing the baboons' song which said, "*Huuuh, we were your fellow humans. Huuuh. We ran away from cultivating. Huuh.*"

Colson field notes, July 25, 1996

A Gwembe Central man in his mid-50s who has accompanied me to Siameja in Gwembe South, is talking with two local elders. He tells them about his father who died in the 1980s and was rich with two vehicles, a gun, a scotch cart, cattle and goats. His father gave some of the cattle to his lineage kin before he died and said the rest should be kept to help the kin and his children. He also said he had used medicine and if his wishes were ignored the goats and sheep would turn into *nsese* (a small antelope). His sister's son who inherited his *muzimo* said this was nonsense and that he had his own ideas and would use the property as he pleased. He sold the cattle and gun and started to kill and eat the goats and sheep. So the goats and sheep ran away. People have found their tracks in the bush in the hills ... and hunters sometimes come across them. They have become like *nsese*. The two elders indicated that they knew of similar things happening.

People and animals, whether of the homestead or the bush, have much in common. All have life (*buumi*) and spirit (*muuya*), and these have to be respected. Domestic animals, however, are intimates of the homestead, under the command of humans who can use them as they see fit, although on occasion livestock serve as human substitutes as in marriage payments and payments to offset homicide or injury. Animals of the bush are never used for such purposes. Livestock are appropriate offerings at lineage and community shrines, while animals

of the bush are not. They are given personal names, cattle receiving ancestral names ritually bestowed while sheep and goats and other animals of the homestead have only nicknames. The acquisition of cattle is celebrated with offerings which place them under protection of the *mizimo* that guard the owner's homestead. But *mizimo* are not attributed to them, nor do they have special powers. They are killed and eaten with impunity.

Though I have never heard the comparison made, domestic animals were comparable to slaves (*bazike*, plural), once common enough, who were members of the *mukwaasi* ('family' in the medieval European sense) and assimilated to the clan of the owner, but at the same time property and disposable at will. In contrast, animals of the bush are free, answerable to no humans, and deal with humans as equals. It is to the most powerful or ambivalent of them, that people attribute the ability to transcend this immediate life and become *mizimo*.

The lion, in some respects, is the most feared and respected of the animals of the bush. It should not be referred to by name (*mulavu*, *shumbwa*, or *syaanza*), especially when one is in the bush or at night. Instead, one says *munyama*, the general term for animal, as though the lion personified the essential nature of all animals. Witches are said to be able to assume various animal forms, but especially that of lions and crocodiles. Those that attack are said to be witches in animal form or to have been sent by witches. Lions are also associated with *malende*, especially those I term places of power. At such places, when people call out to *basangu*, the *basangu* may appear in lion or snake form.

In Gwembe South, the lion is also associated with the spirits causing *impande* possession and with *mondolo*, the conus shell that is a symbol of chiefly power here as elsewhere in eastern Africa. Everywhere the killing of a lion was comparable to killing a human enemy and entitled the killer to wear the scarlet feather of the *lourie* (*induba*). The lion killer, like the man killer, was vulnerable to haunting by the ghost (*celo*) of his victim. A Plateau elder in the 1940s described how the lion killer dreams at night that the lion is prowling around the house waiting to kill him. The killer should make an image of the lion – one of the few instances we have of the ritual use of an image – and place it in a hole in the ground while he instructs the ghost to depart. I know nothing of any ritual associated with the moment of the kill unless the lion was itself

a mankiller. Then its body was burned much like the body of a witch killed to rid a community from attack. The *muuya* of a lion survives death, but elders disagreed on whether it gives rise to a *muzimo*.

Other animals regarded as having special powers which the hunter must offset are the elephant, eland, kudu, hippopotamus, and the pangolin or scaly-anteater (Scudder 1962: 195-96). The names of the first three take the *mu/ba* prefixes also used for humans: the last two take prefixes that associate them with objects. All, save the scaly ant-eaters, are clan totems, although the majority of totemic animals have no special powers. Gwembe Tonga speak most often of the power of elephant, eland and kudu. It is generally agreed that they derive their powers, at least in part, from the bush: animals that eat many kinds of leaves take into themselves the power of these plants.

Some Gwembe Central elders said they thought it possible that these particular animals give rise to *mizimo* because of the way they behave when one of their number is killed. If an elephant is killed, other elephants come some weeks later to break down trees and tear up brush to cover the bones before trampling over the spot as humans do in the funeral dance (*kutatila*) upon a grave. Even if it is a solitary elephant, a single elephant will come to the site. Since elephants mourn, they can be assumed to take the *muzimo* of a dead elephant, just as humans take the *muzimo* of their dead at the end of a funeral. If an eland or kudu is killed, three days later other eland or kudu come to graze over the spot and scuff up the ground around the bones. After this they never return to the spot. "Since animals mourn the death of their kind and take this trouble, we can be certain that this is because they have *mizimo*." Gwembe South elders said that animals do not have *mizimo*. They admitted that some animals have to be treated in special fashion after the kill, but this is because they have *inguzu* (power, strength). To them the kudu was especially powerful, but this was because it eats the leaves of many plants and so ingests much medicine. Therefore, the hunter needed to be treated with special medicines to be able to see the kudu which easily makes itself invisible.

Gwembe hunters in the 1950s and 1960s spoke most often of the special medicines (*bwalu*) needed by the elephant hunter, but they seemed more impressed with the mystical dangers associated with eland hunting. Eland should be hunted only by mature men whose

parents were dead, for the man whose parents still lived brought about their death by killing an eland unless an experienced eland hunter treated him immediately. The dead eland was first struck with a twig of *muntiokela* (*Comniphora* sp.), the tree also used for the hunter's shrine. It was then safe to touch the body. Eland meat could be eaten neither by a pregnant woman nor by her husband, for the unborn child was again vulnerable. Eland, therefore, were potentially dangerous to both the ascending and descending generations from the hunter. Plateau hunters showed no such concern, but said a man who killed an eland was treated by members of his own and his father's clan who inserted medicines in small slashes on his arms and then provided him with wristlets of beads (Colson et al. 1991:40). These are reminiscent of the bead wristlets placed on a Plateau child's wrists when it is given ancestral names from the father's and mother's kin.

Throughout much of Africa the pangolin or scaly anteater is an animal of power. In some regions its killing requires elaborate purification rituals carried out by members of a pangolin guild (Biebuyck 1973:28, 98-99; Douglas 1963:209; Vansina 1990:74). Elders from throughout Gwembe said that the pangolin must be respected because it is a *mwami* ("big man" or "chief") and has great power, but they denied that the *muuya* of a dead pangolin becomes a *muzimo*. Oddly enough, Gwembe children can kill a pangolin with impunity, but if a man reaches adulthood before seeing one, he may not kill it or one of his own children will die. Nor may the killer eat its flesh. Preferably it should be taken alive to the *ulanyika* ('owner of the land') who places it on the ground in front of his house. Whereupon the pangolin is said to turn, enter the house of the senior wife, and go straight to the bed where it bows its head. It was then butchered on a hoe blade (the price of a man at the beginning of the twentieth century), which was the reward of the finder. The meat was taken by the owner of the land. The fat was prized as food, but could not be eaten by a pregnant woman or her husband because the child might be harmed. The flesh of zebra or any animal marked with stripes or spots was also forbidden to a pregnant woman and her husband, but this was for fear that the child would be similarly marked, rather than any belief that the animals were vested with special power.

Although homestead and bush are conceptually different universes in many contexts, the animals of the bush, especially elephants, are alert to what happens in the homestead and signal this to hunters. Wives of hunters, and possibly any woman living in the hunter's homestead, were forbidden to stamp grain during the daytime when their husbands were actively hunting. They stamped at night when hunters would be in camp. Otherwise lions or other dangerous animals would attack the hunters. Wives tied their waist clothes loosely so that the hunters could run easily if attacked. The adultery of an elephant hunter's wife was immediately known to the elephants who signaled that "she slept in the bush" by breaking off branches and throwing them at the hunters. If a wife's lover were in the same hunting party, elephants attacked the camp site, and they might also attack even if the wife only joked with someone in the village, whether it be man or woman. If a death occurred in the village, the elephant tore leaves from trees or covered their bodies with dust as mourners whiten their body with dust and ash. Hunters themselves were forbidden to head carry while on the hunt. We could get no explanation for this, but the taboo has gender implications since women commonly head load while men use a shoulder pole. If women accompanied a hunting party, as they did on some communal drives, men slept in one camp and women in another.

The Hunter and the Wild

Until the end of the nineteenth century, and much later in many parts of Tonga country including Gwembe Valley, probably every man did some hunting, especially at the time of the communal drives, but only a few men considered themselves to be hunters (*bavwimi*, *muwimi*, sing.). No one remembered anything of hunters' guilds like those found among the Ndembu of western Zambia (Turner 1957:28-31), the Bisa of the Luangwa Valley (Marks 1976:61-64), the Lamba of Central Province (Doke 1931:321ff), the Kaonde (Melland 1923: 259-60), or the Ila who are closely related to the Tonga (Smith and Dale 1920:1:168). Yet passages in Livingstone (1857:574) and Livingstone (1865:230) suggest the existence in the 1850s and 1860s of Tonga hunting guilds for elephant and hippopotamus. On both journeys, David Livingstone commented on the abundance of game on the Plateau and along the Zambezi River and on the prowess of the hunters.

In 1957, B. Reynolds (1968:65-66) found that Gwembe hunters had a specialized knowledge of various kinds of traps or other hunting techniques and worked with the help of *mizimo*, but they were less concerned with hunting rituals and hunting shrines than other Zambians such as the Luvale (see also Scudder 1962:191ff). Even so, in the 1950s, Gwembe elders said that hunters needed special powers because animals, especially large animals, also have power and have *muuya* or spirit just as humans do. Hunters obtained power to find and kill animals either from *mizimo* who revealed hunting methods and hunting magic in dreams or by purchase from other hunters. They were also subject to taboos which disassociated them from the normal life of the homestead.

Sexual relations associated with marriage and the household belong to the domain of the homestead. They are taboo within the domain of the hunt. On the night before the hunt, while he might sleep in the same house as his wife, including a menstruating wife, the hunter could not share her bed. In the morning he did not wash, a sign of abstinence since after sexual play a man washed using a small pot kept close to the bed and known as the pot of marriage (*kabia kabwiinga*). But just as sexual relations appropriate to the homestead were taboo while hunting, sexual relations forbidden in the domain of homestead and *cisi* were thought to empower some kinds of hunting shrines and their associated hunting techniques. These could only be activated through incest (classified as *malweza*, a taboo act or an act that brings or signals misfortune) of the hunter with a woman of his own lineage or clan. Gwembe Central informants said that on the day when such a shrine was first built, the hunter entered the house of his mother or sister and had intercourse with her. In the 1970s Weinrich (1977:65) was told by Gwembe South Tonga in Zimbabwe that the night before going on a hunt, a man should place his spear in front of his sister's house, enter and sleep with her. Early in the morning, she would leave the hut, before her brother emerged. "The people believed that the ancestors would bless such intercourse by enabling the man to kill many animals the following day." Gwembe Central speakers attributed success not to ancestors in general but to the *muzimo* that summoned the man to become a hunter. It represented a former hunter who had learned that success in the hunt meant breaking with the norms that control life within the human community.

Not all men were prepared to do so. Some in the 1950s said they had refused to accept a divination in which a *muzimo* ordered them to build a shrine of this type. Such shrines, however, did exist in Gwembe Central in the 1950s and 1960s, and their owners were suspected of having used close female kin as sexual partners. In the 1990s I heard incest attributed to a successful hunter. This breaking of normal human rules is also the sign of the witch, and the belief that hunters, who necessarily shed blood, offend against kinship morality associates them with witches who do not scruple to harm others to gain their ends.

According to B. Reynolds (1968:66), a hunter pours beer at his shrine before a hunt. I think this unlikely. Rather, the hunter places a small pot with water and grain at the shrine and makes the offering with water. After the hunt, if the kill is close enough to the homestead and the animal is small enough to be carried, he offers again at the shrine before butchering. Otherwise he butchers at the kill and brings home the meat which he first places at the shrine before distributing it. Then when the grain has sprouted to provide ferment for the beer, he has beer made and proceeds with a further offering. A hunter may also offer a chicken at his shrine when he first installs it, or before beginning a hunt, or if he acquires a new gun. While only black chickens are taken to a *malende*, the chicken killed at a hunter's shrine may be of any colour. It is killed in the same fashion, by being held by the legs while its neck is broken by being beaten against the upright post of the shrine. The blood is then allowed to drip over the upright and the spear or gun used in the kill while the hunter calls upon the empowering *muzimo* for protection and success.

When a man wishes to hunt in a neighbourhood where he is not resident, he should ask either the owner of the land (*ulyanika*) or a resident hunter for an introduction to the forces that rule the region. The sponsor brings the hunter before his own shrine and asks his own empowering *muzimo* to assist and protect the visitor. If the visitor makes a kill, he ought to give thanks at the shrine of his host who fastens a circlet of beads around his wrist and gun or spear as he calls out "May this always kill when he uses it. The animals must fall before it." The host then kills a chicken at the shrine and allows the blood to drip on both weapon and shrine. The meat is used in a communion meal shared by the hunter and the members of the host homestead.

I saw such a ritual performed at Chona on the Plateau in 1948, and I know of their occurrence in Gwembe into the 1980s. In 1972 game guards, sent to shoot maurauding elephants in Chezia, a Gwembe Central neighbourhood, were introduced at the hunting shrine of one of the headmen. When they failed to kill, various people complained that failure was to be expected since this headman was not the owner of the earth, i.e., neither *sikatongo* nor *ulyanika*, even though the village had been resettled in a new area in 1958, and he might easily have been defined as the first settler initiating a new *katongo*. They held that the guards should have been presented at the hunting shrine of the man who had been a *sikatongo* in their original site.

A hunter who offers at his own shrine, should not act by himself. In this he plays by a rule that differentiates religious rituals from the activities of witches. His co-offerer should be a woman of his own lineage who lifts the offering, whether it be a calabash of beer or a chicken, from its place at the front of the shrine and hands it to the hunter. After he pours the beer or kills the chicken while invoking the *muzimo*, she also pours or touches the chicken and makes an invocation. The form of offering reflects the fact that although the shrine is associated with the male hunter, both men and women have an interest in the outcome of the hunt. Both will share in the meat and both must be represented at the offering that empowers the hunter and gives thanks to the ancestors who give game to people. Some may also see this as an acknowledgment that the shrine is associated with an act of incest that joined together a man and woman of the lineage. But a lineage woman shares in offering at hunting shrines even where the techniques are said not to require such empowerment. In the invocation the dead hunter is asked to bring with him the *mizimo* of his sisters to share what has been given him (see also Weinrich 1977:78). The woman co-offerer has a right to a portion of the hunter's kill. One can see all this as a symbolic statement that the lineage is associated with hunting in contrast to the family or *mukwashi* which belongs to the homestead, or that it signifies the conflicting desires of lineage women and household women for the meat of the kill. But, as in much else, the symbolism is ambivalent, for it is the wife who must observe the taboos while the hunter is in the bush.

Both lineage and household, however, are endangered by the very success that provides them with meat, for hunting is seen as antithetical to both. The chickens and beer offered at the hunting shrine are only surrogates for the human lives also demanded by success. The more successful the hunter, the more likely he is to be suspected of sacrificing his children and lineage members, for success is said to involve the acquisition of medicines activated by the spirits (*zelo*) of the hunter's human victims. These he uses to drive game into his traps or to his waiting gun or spear. Suspicion is strongest against hunters said to use *bwalu*, a term whose meaning I have been unable to fathom fully, and the *inzilo* hunting shrine used for snare and net hunting. This is the shrine most often associated with incest.

An *inzilo* is said to resemble the hunting shrines that stand in the doorway, where approach is subject to public scrutiny, but the *inzilo* is built in the bush. I have never seen one, nor talked with anyone who claimed to have such a shrine himself, but any successful net or pit hunter was likely to be assumed to work with one. Gwembe Central men said that the builder places coals in a small clay pot through whose rope handle he then thrusts a spear and with this, a hoe and his gun, he goes into the bush to a site where he selects a good sized tree. Near this he digs a small pit which he covers as in a pitfall. He then invokes the *muzimo* that has given him the skill, but how he does this is left vague, for "only one who has *inzilo* would know."

While hunting medicines endanger the hunter's kin, they also put the hunter at risk. All great success, whether it be as farmer, hunter, or trader, is said to be acquired at a cost, first to one's kin but ultimately to oneself. The 1956 death from advanced leprosy of a formerly successful elephant hunter of Gwembe Central was attributed to hunting medicine he had purchased in Gwembe South. This was said to have turned on him and drained his own life force because he failed to provide it with regular offerings of the life force of his kin. The hunter, therefore, is both suspect by others and at times sees himself as at risk, not only from the dangers of the bush but from the medicines he uses to protect and empower himself. But he is vindicated by the belief that he is compelled to this way of life: the *mizimo* insist that he hunt or he will fall ill and perhaps die if he refuses. When he goes into the bush he goes with the mandate of the *mizimo* and under their protection. He is

therefore still a member of the human community who is assuming responsibilities dictated to him by spirit guardians.

The Quintessence of Wilderness

Kusinka ('to obstruct', 'to stop', 'to dam up') epitomizes how people conceive of the bush as the embodiment of power antithetical to human power. It takes place only occasionally. I heard of it being performed in 1972 when a lineage lost a number of adult members in quick succession and divination found that they were being killed by the *indilile* medicine of someone who had instructed it to wipe out the lineage of the one who had killed him. Members of the lineage took a chicken into the bush, pierced its eyes, burned some medicine, threw the chicken into the bush and fled, having left death (*lufu*) behind them in the bush.

Kusinka was also used at the instruction of a *basangu* medium after other attempts to obtain rain and good crops have failed or when there is fear of insect destruction. I have seen it only once, in 1957 in a Gwembe Central neighbourhood, when it was included in the various actions taken to obtain rain, but this conformed to descriptions of *kusinka* performed elsewhere. I last heard of it being carried out in the 1970s. I do not know if it was ever used on the Plateau.

In 1957, early in the morning I joined a few men gathered to clap before the house of the woman *basangu* medium who had given instructions the day before that *kusinka* must be performed. Then, before dawn, we filed out of the village through nearby fields and having crossed a river went on to the outer bounds of the *cisi*, moving to the beat of a single drum. People said that in the past those who remained in the village were forbidden to eat or drink while the men were gone and even babies were refused the breast, and all were required to stay quietly in their homesteads while the delegation was in danger. Thus they too participated.

In 1957, at the place of assembly, the men awaited representatives of two adjoining neighbourhoods. When they arrived, a fire was lit and spears were stacked against a tree. The men gave no explanation, but fire is associated with hearth and homestead and the leaning of spears turned the tree into a spear rest like the one that stands beside the door of a house. The spears remained at the tree while the men

moved on another hundred yards. They were now well beyond the cultivated or highly frequented part of their territory. At a glade backed by low brush, they began cutting small trees which were stacked to make a fence extending about two hundred feet. Grass was then gathered and woven into small wreaths which were hung on the fence. Each man worked on his own without any verbal instructions. Indeed throughout little was said except for an occasional shout to ask how far the fence had reached on previous occasions. The men had brought with them packets of leaves of maize, sorghum and millet – the primary crops – as well as a small black chicken. One of them crossed over the fence, chicken in hand, to kneel facing outward into the further bush. As he pierced the eyes of the chicken and flung it toward the bush, the other men tossed their packets of leaves over the fence. Then with a shout all turned and ran back to seize their spears and continue on the path for home, never looking back. Later they said that some unspecified fearful thing would destroy us if we looked back. A mile or so from the fire, they stopped for the formal inquest characteristic of many Tonga occasions. During this they agreed that a communal hunting drive should take place the following day. On reaching the village, they stopped first at the house of the *basangu* medium to clap and report. She thanked them saying, “The *Basangu* says that what is in the bush is satisfied”. That day no work was permitted in the fields.

No hunt followed, perhaps because people decided it was best to wait and see what happened. I was told, however, that the hunt that follows *kusinka* is a mass drive, involving all neighbourhood men who move through the bush with drums and the blare of cattle-horn trumpets. Game may be killed, but this is not the purpose: the drive is an appeal for rain or for crop protection. I see it also as a statement of community solidarity and strength in the face of the forces of the bush, just as the fence built during *kusinka* separates the human space of the *cisi* from the wild.

The Death of a Metaphor

In the past the bush was a key metaphor, with multiple complex associations signifying danger, uncertainty, and illicit activities, as well as profitable new opportunities, standing in direct contrast to

that other key metaphor, homestead/village/neighbourhood. The metaphor derived its meanings from the common experience of all Tonga who contrasted the safety of the homestead with the unsubdued bush that surrounded it. Among Zambezi dwellers, the great river which swallowed the bodies of witches or children whose humanity was denied and also threatened death through drowning or crocodile attack, carried some of the same connotations: like bush it lay outside the domestic domain. But even on the Zambezi Plain, bush was the dominant metaphor used to symbolize the sphere of the wild in contrast to the sphere under human control.

By the 1940s, for Plateau Tonga, *sokwe*, bush, had lost much of its metaphorical content with the transformation of bush areas into human settlement, so that one moved through fields en route from village to village. But it had acquired a new emphasis as the undesired, as the term now referred primarily to the invasive weeds that must be fought lest they overwhelm the crop. In Gwembe Valley, bush took on new salience with the Kariba resettlement in 1958, when people complained that the Europeans were throwing them away into the bush where they would become like wild animals. Many were settled in areas rich in game. Those taken to Lusitu in Gwembe North described how on their first nights in the new area they lay shaking from fright as elephants trumpeted and lions roared in the nearby bush. Only gradually did they domesticate the bush, turning it into fields or pasture land for cattle, explored and known, its features given names which mapped it and made it the subject of human discourse. Yet periodically they were reminded that it was alien to them, as when “freedom fighters” camped there during the struggle for Zimbabwe in the 1970s, or when big game reinvaded from Zimbabwe. Those who emigrated to the western Plateau in the 1980s, to begin farming in a former game management area, saw themselves as creating settlement in what had been bush. In Gwembe and for those of its inhabitants who pioneered new areas elsewhere, the contrast between homestead or village and bush may still seem relevant, but it is less salient than in the 1950s.

For many Tonga who now grow up in towns and cities, bush in the old sense has little meaning. When Zambian independence reoriented life and the great opportunities were in education and urban

employment, young men turned their backs on the acquisition of old skills such as hunting and strove instead for places in secondary schools and acquired medicines to insure success in examinations and placement. Bush then came to carry connotations of “country” in contrast to town, of lack of sophistication in urban ways, of being out of touch with the times. It lost its old importance as a metaphor for the great nonhuman sources of power pervasive of the wild, and became almost a synonym for village life.

Given the heterogenous experiences characteristic of both children and adults in the present time, no single set of metaphors can have the same compelling evocative power as the old metaphors of bush, homestead, *cisi*. Those with different experiences set different boundaries between the ordered known and the disorder associated with the unknown or with powers considered to be outside one’s immediate control. For some the primary contrast may now be that between town and country. For others by the 1980s it may have been the contrast between affluent residential areas of the cities and the squatter settlements around the city outskirts, although as garbage went uncollected and roads were unrepaired, by the 1990s disorder spread into the affluent areas. For others the boundary may be political, between the known of Zambia and all that is encompassed by the world outside its boundaries. But as Zambia is seen as increasingly disordered and unpredictable, it may also be that what is external to it is now seen as the domain of order.

But here too ambiguity reigns. In common thought, the international world has become the source of the food that feeds the population in hunger years, and the home of “donors”, i.e. the international agencies, who are able to provide those things that contemporary Tonga like other Zambians see as essential to the good life. In one sense, the international world is like the bush, on which people once relied when the crops failed and to which they turned for extra empowerment. It is also like the bush, in that it is unpredictable and contains malevolent forces.

Christianity is associated with the international world, and as the Tonga once turned to the *basangu* to come to terms with the forces of the bush, so they now turn to Christianity as they come to terms with the uncertainties of the international system. But they also underline its unpredictability and ruthlessness, when they attribute to its agents

the desire to profit from their blood and flesh in the stories that now circulate of the *abanyama*, servants of Europeans and Indians, who turn those they encounter into zombies or drain their life force to strengthen foreign enterprises, or of more recent emissaries who remove hearts and other body parts to be sold on the international market (Colson 2000:339-41; L White 2000). Such agents are said to be encountered in the bush or on the roads rather than in the safety of the homestead itself (see Chapter Nine).

Yet, homestead and village, under human control, are also the hotbed of such human emotions as envy, jealousy, malice, and ambition which turn its inhabitants into the witches who prey upon their kin and other close associates in a desire for revenge or a willingness to use other people to their own ends. Divinations attribute most misfortunes to the ambitions and rivalries of those who live together. Again and again through the years I have been told by close friends, "You don't understand. You think we are good, but we have envy (*munyono*). We kill each other."

The bush is dangerous, but it is the homestead, that metaphor for the human order, that exposes one to the evil seen as inherent in the human condition.

CHAPTER VI

**RITUAL COMMUNITIES
AND ACTORS**

The Importance of Community

Religious activity in the past, for the most part, took place in the presence of others and derived some of its meaning from the kind of community assembled for the occasion and the persons who officiated. The Tonga would find Durkheim's thesis of the relationship between community and religion unproblematic (Durkheim 1965:59-63).

The stress was on the actions to be carried out rather than on an explication of meaning. Those first required to officiate in a ritual role were told by their instructors only that this is the way things are done or this is what the spirits desire.

Those coming together in ritual said they did so because they were members of a territorial community (*cisi*), or had some kinship tie, or suffered from the same physical affliction in the case of a *masabe* gathering. As already discussed, in living memory Tonga have not had professional associations such as have been reported for other Zambian peoples (Marks 1976:61-69; Turner 1957:28-31; Smith and Dale 1920:202-211). Although men group by age at some public gatherings, and may speak of themselves as being of the same age grouping (*musela*), they have no collective initiation that marks them off as an age set. On the western Plateau, where young men spent long periods in cattle camps on the Kafue Plain, they may once have been formally introduced to the elders in a ritual that allowed them to associate freely with senior men, but by the 1940s this had disappeared (see Chapter Seven). Plateau and hill girls were and are secluded and instructed individually at puberty, and each was greeted on her emergence in a ceremony organized by her own kin, to which all in the neighbourhood were invited. Girls of the Zambezi Plain in Gwembe South and Gwembe Central were not secluded.

Recently a new kind of ritual community has emerged. This is one based on faith, as adherents of various Christian sects, now competing for adherents everywhere in Zambia, separate themselves from their neighbours to join together with other Christians of the same persuasion, and make their distinctiveness explicit through the building of separate places of worship. Thus in the 1980s and 1990s residents of Musulumba Village in Gwembe North gathered into congregations associated with Catholic, Seventh Day Adventist, Salvation Army, Faith Apostolic and First Apostolic Churches, and in the late 1990s Baptist missionaries

were trying to form a congregation in the neighbourhood. At Sinafala, in Gwembe Central, people chose between Pilgrim Methodist and Seventh Day Adventist, or joined the Catholics or Apostolics in their meeting places in the next village. At Siameja the choice was among Catholic, Seventh Day Adventist, First Apostolic, New Apostolic, and Pentecostal, while the Church of Christ Mission was trying to reestablish a congregation founded there in the 1960s. Reasons for choosing to join one or another church are anything but clear. So far village society is not sufficiently differentiated that the various churches cater to different economic or other strata, and people shift from one church to another rather easily. Adherents of the various churches rarely give any explanation of why they follow an order of service or carry out any action, other than that this is how you should act as a member of the sect or that you are a servant of Satan bound for hell if you do not so act, or that this is what the Bible says you must do. Many Seventh Day Adventists and other fundamentalists are prepared to quote chapter and verse. The cynical say that people weigh the material benefits to be obtained and choose the church that currently offers most. Churches that can draw on overseas resources may benefit from such expediency, but those locally founded, that have no such resources, still attract adherents. Something more than a search for material benefit lies behind the recent popularity of church membership, as well as the growing diversity of denominational choices.

Earlier faith did not separate. Belief was not systematized in the absence of anyone with power to enunciate a dogma. Moreover, religion was much too adapted to experience and experience was much too general for faith to be divisive. No small elite group developed an esoteric form of the common religion. People shared the same ways of living and had little need to explain the meaning of ritual which reflected the common experience. Those who had that experience needed no explanation. Those who lacked the experience were outside the religious community. This is in line with what Patrick Kalilombe (1999:212) has said of African religion in general, that it is "essentially a way of living in the visible sphere in relation with the invisible world. This relationship pervades the whole of life, of individuals as well as of the community – or rather, of individuals in the community."

Neighbourhoods as Ritual Communities: Katongo

The residents of each small rural neighbourhood are associated through their common vulnerability to the natural forces, including epidemics, that affect crops, stock, and people, and in the past the possibility of raiding parties. They joined together to appeal for fertility of fields and stock and immunity from disease and to ward off threatened disasters. They make explicit this sense of sharing a common fate when they say, "The rain falls on the fields of all of us." Interestingly, this is not entirely true, an instance where dogma overrides experience, for rainfall may be highly localized even within a single neighbourhood.

Everyone within the neighbourhood was expected to observe the rituals that regulate the agricultural cycle. These, together with special appeals to the *basangu*, are called "the work of the neighbourhood" (*milimo wacisi*). The term *milimo* refers back to the primary occupation in which formerly all were involved, the cultivation of the soil, for the noun that now means work in general is derived from *ku-lima* ("to cultivate", "to hoe"). Much as the hunter was respected, it was cultivation which characterized one as fully human, as witness the children's song of the baboon (Chapter Five).

The rituals of the agricultural cycle could also be called "the work of *katongo*", using the term under which the neighbourhood is recognized as a ritual unit rooted in the past. *Katongo* shares the same root as *matongo*, an abandoned homestead site, and it reminds people that the neighbourhood was created by the labor of those who first settled it, whose ancient homestead sites with their graves dot the area, and whose lineage heirs serve as custodians of the land and have ritual priority over later comers.

Emphasis upon first settlement that rooted the community in the past was strongest on the Zambezi Plain where villages moved little and fields were in long-term cultivation. Notably after the Kariba resettlement in 1958, when all inhabitants of a village or neighbourhood moved simultaneously, no one among them could claim priority in the new area of settlement. This made it more difficult to reestablish neighbourhoods as ritual communities under the leadership of a land custodian.

By the 1940s and 1950s the shifting cultivators of the hills and Plateau spoke of *katongo* as important in the past. Even where they

said that *katongo* still existed, the ritual leader of the neighbourhood was not necessarily descended from a primal settler. Land shrines might be at the grave sites of twentieth century men or women who had been mediums or otherwise led the people. In some instances the shrine commemorated a local figure who, as medium or entrepreneur, had caught the attention of colonial officials in search of authority figures through whom to exercise rule and so had been appointed chiefs. In the 1940s, four land shrines of Nampeyo, in Chona Chieftaincy on the Zambian Plateau, were under the control of the Bakonka clan who were said to hold the *katongo*. The shrines were those of Mavwali (remembered as having controlled powerful magic in the early nineteenth century), Chona (an immigrant who succeeded in dominating the area from mid nineteenth century until his death about 1890), Nangoma (Chona's sister's daughter who as a *basangu* medium was in charge of the ritual work of the neighborhood until her death about 1927), and Namukamba (her son who became headman of the village founded by Chona). Another shrine, that of Hangaba, despite the fact that the Baleya clan controlled its ritual, was said to have been initiated by Nangoma (Colson et al. 1991:56-68). I suspect that Hangaba derived from an earlier Baleya settlement, but was redefined when the Bakonka, under Chona, came to dominate the neighbourhood. In the 1940s Chobana, both a *basangu* medium and a son of Nangoma, was in charge of the "work of the neighbourhood".

Replacement of land shrines by shrines representing more recent alignments within the neighbourhood may have been a common phenomenon both on the Plateau and in Gwembe Valley. In some instances, older shrines continued to be approached, but only if the rains continued to fail after people had gone to more recent shrines. In Chezia neighbourhood in Gwembe Central in 1956-57, people first rebuilt the *kaanda* at the land shrine of Chakonzia, associated with the Bafumu clan. Only when the drought continued did they visit what they said was an older land shrine associated with the Bakuli clan (Scudder 1962:111-112). The same kind of subordination of an older shrine by one associated with a more recent figure seems to have happened at Nyanga in the hills of Gwembe South. For the most part, however, the political order introduced by the colonial government which grouped people in villages and chieftaincies and ruled through

headmen and chiefs was not given religious validation through the creation of new ritual communities. The offices of headman and chief were regarded as “affairs of government”, while neighbourhoods continued to deal with the spirits of the land through earth priests, perhaps bush custodians, and *basangu* mediums. In neighbourhoods with both a bush custodian (*ulanyika*) and an earth priest, the earth priest received first fruits as crops ripened whereas it was the bush custodian who received hunter’s trophies (Scudder 1962:111-128). These included a living scaly anteater (*inkanka*), the skins and claws of lion and leopard, and that portion of a large game animal which struck the ground first.

In the past, hunting must have been of considerable importance, with communal game drives initiated by earth priest or bush custodian, but large game was killed out over much of the Plateau by the 1930s and was already scarce in much of Gwembe by the mid-1950s (Scudder 1962:196-7). The Game Department preempts the right to kill large animals and communal hunts have been banned since the 1950s. By the 1990s hunting was either for small game, such as wild pig and duiker, or involved poaching elephant and rhino in Zimbabwe. Communal ritual associated with hunting, and the claims of a bush custodian are therefore now largely extinct, a matter of memory among the few surviving elderly men who once hunted. Those who now hunt rely on personal medicines or empowerment by a *muzimo*.

Communal fish drives have also disappeared along with the rituals once associated with them. These included an announcement of the drive by the earth priest to the *basangu*. This took place at the land shrine. A second invocation was made on arrival at the pools where the drive was to take place. After this the earth priest initiated fishing by dipping his spear or net into the water before others entered (Machila 1990:45-46). Although people continue to fish, and both lake and river fishing have become important commercial activities, no communal ritual now seems to be associated with fishing. Government officials announce the opening and closing of fishing in various rivers or in Kariba Lake, decree the size of nets, and otherwise seek to control the industry. Any rituals associated with fishing are carried out by individual fishermen who are said mostly to rely on purchased charms to ensure success.

Rituals associated with the annual agricultural cycle continued to be relevant for much longer, but today are much attenuated almost everywhere. Once they included rituals to inaugurate the cleaning of fields prior to planting (*lwiindi lwakulyata makuba*), planting (*lwiindi lwamwaka*), weeding and bird scaring (*lwiindi lwakuyamina*), first fruits (*lwiindi lwakuloka*), and celebration of harvest (*lwiindi lwakutebula*), as well as special appeals for rain or protection in times of danger. These were times of celebration, and for this reason, if someone died during a time of *lwiindi*, no mourning could take place until it finished.

Seeds for planting were once ritually made fecund by the earth priest and his wife. The people of the neighbourhood brought samples of their seed to the earth priest who mixed it together with seed from his own store, and placed the lot beneath the bed on which he and his wife slept together. In the morning, they redistributed the seed among the people who mixed it with their seeds for planting. Planting, weeding, and bird scaring were first carried out in the ritual field of the earth priest, representatives of the community coming for this purpose. First eating of each cultivated crop as it ripened was also the duty of the earth priest and his wife, as was the initiating of harvesting and the brewing of beer from the new grain. All important activities of the agricultural cycle were thus seen as orchestrated by the earth priest even though in actuality he might have to be prodded to carry out the duty. In some neighborhoods the earth priest was also the first to eat of wild spinaches that were staple relishes, and his wife should be the first to cut thatch. The earth priest led the appeals for rain at the land shrine associated with his ancestors, usually under the direction of local *basangu* mediums. Earth priests might also have the obligation to initiate the burning of bush for hunting and the opening of fish ponds for fish drives (Machila 1990:73; Scudder 1962:111ff).

Few neighbourhoods on the Plateau now follow such routines (Machila 1989:iiv). There, cash cropping, the possibilities for employment and the knowledge that food could be purchased if the crops failed revolutionized the relationship between people and the land by the 1940s. Some rituals also became obsolete when Plateau cultivators switched from sorghums and millets, the crops most associated with ritual and most threatened by bird damage, to concentrate upon growing maize for both subsistence and a cash crop. This had happened

by the 1930s. As noted in Chapter Four, Plateau communal rituals were also undercut by missionaries who encouraged the destruction of land shrines and forbade school children and converts to attend communal rituals. Also European settlement occupied some *malende* sites in the 1920s and again in the 1940s. By the 1940s many were sceptical of the power of spirits associated with land shrines, given that Christians who refused to participate in the annual rituals or obey taboos still obtained a crop. After independence, the Zambian government continued to undercut reliance on agricultural rituals through extension teaching, and by subordinating ritual claims to economic interests when it ignored protests that a proposed dam or other project would destroy a shrine (Machila 1989:94ff).

Nevertheless, even on the Plateau, some neighbourhoods still celebrate the planting and harvest *lwiindi* and appeals for rain still take place. In 1987, a drought year, Machila attended appeals for rain at fifteen land shrines in Hanjalika Chieftaincy and heard of appeals held in Mwanza, Chona, Naluama and Mwenda Chieftaincies (Machila 1989:110-11). In the late 1990s, appeals were carried out at land shrines in Chona Chieftaincy and elsewhere. In 2003 I was shown a land shrine in the west of Monze Chieftaincy said to be the grave site of a *basangu* prophet who died in the 1990s, and I know of gatherings to appeal for rain at Plateau land shrines in 2004. Annually visits are paid to the shrine of Gonde, at a time appropriate for the harvest *lwiindi*. It is not clear, however, the extent to which these are now associated with the work of the neighbourhood, for some of the Tonga educated elite hope to make Gonde into a national shrine for all Tonga- speakers and those speaking related languages, who are increasingly grouped together as the *Bantu Botatwe* (Colson 1996; 75; Machila 1990:112; O'Brien and O'Brien 1996). This has resonance among Tonga-speakers who feel the necessity of having a Tonga ceremony on a par with the annual ceremonies through which other peoples of Zambia now celebrate their ethnicity, and the annual gathering at Gonde, which is held in the cold season when travel is easiest, attracts people from a large area in what in essence is a political occasion (*The Post*: July 8, 2004).

Elsewhere, if communal rituals continue to be carried out at land shrines or places of power, they are focused almost exclusively upon appeals for rain, so crucial in a region which has been increasingly

subject to drought through the 1980s and 1990s. Here the new technologies introduced by the colonial and then the Zambian states are ineffective. The churches have tried to cater to the anxieties begotten by precarious rainfall in a region prone to drought. To replace the banned appeals at *malende*, they organize their own appeals for rain, which may involve a march through the fields to a nearby river, but these involve only members of their own congregations.

In Gwembe Valley, in the 1950s, agriculture was still subsistence agriculture with sorghums and millets staple crops along with maize. Missions had little influence except in the few neighbourhoods where they had schools and could order school children to avoid community and kinship rituals. The ritual organization relating to communal concerns was therefore still in place until 1958. Then the forcible resettlement of the majority of the population made meaningless rituals that relied on the assumption that local communities continued to carry out routines created by their ancestors when they first settled and domesticated a region and found ways of dealing with the powers inherent in the land (Colson 1971:225ff).

Two premises underlay rituals associated both with the territorial group and groups organized in lineages and households. The first is that marriage is appropriate to the human condition. The second is that human life is based on agriculture. *Katongo* rituals emphasize the importance of the roles of husband and wife, represented by the earth priest and his wife who at various phases of the ritual cycle must give efficacy to soil, seeds, and human labour by their sexual union. Through their sexuality they tap all fertility. This in turn ensures a continuity that they also represent in their roles as successors of the first dyad, composed of the man and woman who founded the community. They are not expected to innovate or to find new solutions when things go wrong. Rather they represent the neighbourhood in its most elemental form as a confederation of domestic households.

Earth priests and their wives may grumble about the labour required of them to prevent disaster, for they may well be blamed if the rains fail or other misfortune strikes the neighbourhood. Somehow they have departed from the routines laid down by the founders or have erred in some other fashion. On the Zambezi Plain they may have offended by first planting in a field other than the one

associated with the primal couple, for here people were much concerned with field boundaries and field ownership. On the Plateau and in the escarpment hills they might be accused of moving too far from the site associated with original settlement. Sometimes they were found to have procrastinated in initiating one of the activities at which they should officiate, or to have failed to provide the sacrificial animal offered at the shrine on some earlier occasion. Their relationship with the primal couple might be questioned. The 1956-57 drought led people in Chezia (Gwembe Central) to much querying of the Bafumu earth priest and his ritual wife. They and members of their lineages were blamed when it was decided that the wife was not the spirit inheritor of her ancestress and predecessor.

The earth priest and his wife are also vulnerable if others transgress by forestalling them in planting or other annual routines, or by cutting trees or thatching grass near the shrines of the neighbourhood. The *basangu* are said to retaliate against anyone in the community or against all by withholding rain, but people think that an individual victim is most likely to be the earth priest or his wife or any member of the *katongo* lineage, for they represent the neighbourhood as a *katongo*.

Entrance into a territorial community is not automatic. Babies who accompany their mothers to a shrine for the first time are ritually introduced. After being lifted from their mother's back by the wife of the earth priest they are placed momentarily at the entrance of the shrine hut (*kaanda*). Most infants were once thus introduced, but, given Tonga pragmatism, those who had not been so introduced acquired membership in the community as they became known to one and all. Strangers who first approach a land shrine are introduced, as I have been, by a sponsor who claps before the shrine and calls out to the *basangu* that this is someone known to the neighbourhood who will not trouble the spirits.

Membership in a neighbourhood depends first of all on residence, which means that settlers must find sponsors and be acceptable to others. On the Plateau, building a house and planting and harvesting a field gives a person the right to die and be buried there. This means they must have lived in the neighbourhood from planting time through harvest, a period of over eight months. On the Zambezi Plain,

where it was possible to plant several times a year – during the rains and again during the dry season as the Zambezi flood receded – membership in the community was still contingent upon harvest. Then, and only then, was the newcomer able to make beer from grain grown in local soils for offering to his or her own ancestors and to host others in the community. For this blessing, the newcomer in turn was indebted to the neighbourhood's rapport with the *basangu* associated with the area. Until he or she could make such an offering, the newcomer remained a stranger whose death within the neighbourhood had to be cleansed in the rite of *ingolomokwa* through which his or her kin returned the spirit to a place where it belonged.

When people speak of the work of the neighbourhood, such as the clearing of the ritual field of *katongo* or its planting, they speak as though the neighbourhood turned out en masse under the direction of the elders. In fact this never happens. In small neighbourhoods each homestead may send a representative. In larger neighbourhoods it is assumed that if some homesteads send workers this year then others will do so another year, and so over time all homesteads will have worked. The few represent the collectivity and evoke the image of the neighbourhood as a united community joined in ritual that benefits all.

Taboos, however, must be honoured by everyone. The failure of one endangers all. This means abstaining from work in the fields on days when work is banned. It means not forestalling the earth priest by initiating a task first, or by first eating ripening foods, or any other action that might anger the *basangu* and the dead who first established *katongo*. If people suspect the spirits have been angered, the community consults diviners or *basangu* mediums to discover the culprit and what must be done to purify itself (*kusalasya*) and restore the relationship with the land and the *basangu*. Commonly the *basangu* require that the culprit produce an animal for sacrifice, which as with all sacrifices ends in a communal meal.

Communities on the Zambezi Plain, which were not dependent on a single harvest, did not have the great harvest *luindi* of the hill and Plateau residents, nor did they give the same emphasis to the *luindi* of planting, gathering at the shrines usually only if the rains failed to come. Near the Zambezi, planting and harvesting might take place simultaneously, and the river on which much depended came to them

from elsewhere and was not subject to *basangu* in the same way as the rain clouds which formed and reformed to favour now this small area and now that. No one community could know or control the Zambezi River, although the people who once lived along its banks still boast of themselves as *Bantu bamulongo* (people of the river), even forty years after Kariba Dam flooded their homelands.

Basangu mediums or prophets speak to *katongo* communities (see Chapter Four, and also Colson 1969 and 1977). Unlike diviners they are consulted primarily on matters of concern to the community at large rather than on personal business, and those who consult them go either as a body of people or send a few representatives who report back to the community. The mediums also summon people to hear messages from their “visitors”, i.e. *basangu*. Usually this means they summon the people of the neighbourhood in which they reside, but mediums are vehicles of spirits conceived of as having concerns that are not bounded by a single neighbourhood. An earth priest has a ritual role only in the community of his *katongo*. A *basangu* medium is a medium wherever he or she may be and may be consulted by people coming from a distance or summon people from elsewhere to hear what the spirit demands of them.

The most famous mediums attract people from a considerable distance in times of drought or other difficulties. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the mediums of greatest prestige lived in the areas of highest rainfall on the edges of the Zambian and Zimbabwean escarpments. Monze, the rainmaker known throughout southern Zambia in the mid-nineteenth century, was visited by Ila and Sala delegations from west and north as well as by Gwembe delegations (Livingstone 1857:554-57; Syaamusonde 1947:47-51; Torrend 1891:288-90). Chibwe, a woman medium famous in the 1940s and 1950s, lived not far from where Monze had his village when Livingstone met him in 1856. She too drew delegations from a wide area: in 1949 she summoned people from twenty miles away to hear what they must do to ward off a threatened epidemic. The medium in Zimbabwe best known in 1956 to Gwembe villagers within Zambia lived at Gokwe in the Zimbabwe escarpment. In the 1970s some Tonga in Zimbabwe still consulted him, but more went to Malila and Muchehe who lived in the same general area (Weinrich 1977:82-84). Such famous mediums may rightly be

called prophets, for they speak of what will happen if people fail to obey their warnings. Potentially the community associated with a medium is unlimited and extends as far as fame spreads. It expands and contracts, reflecting the varying appeal of rival mediums who may be vehicles of the same or different *basangu*. The latter may be previously unknown or present again after long absence.

Elsewhere in Central Africa, communities associated with mediums and territorial shrines may be a palimpsest of former political communities (Garbett 1969, 1977; Lan 1985; Schoffeleers 2000; Werbner 1977;). A few Tonga shrines, such as that of Monze, may hark back into a past when people organized themselves in larger political communities than the neighbourhoods which were so dominant a feature of the recent past. Some of the *basangu* associated with recent mediums may represent ancient political rulers. But the general fluidity of communities that form around mediums and the search for help from mediums living afar seem to me rather to represent a recognition of a general dependence upon natural forces which cannot be confined within the geographical boundaries created by the human order. Drought may devastate large areas, epidemics sweep through the countryside unmindful of *katongo* boundaries. The people who form communities may themselves be scattered. The *basangu* and their mediums who cross boundaries reflect this larger sense of community.

Communities of Kinship: Clan, Lineage and Lutundu

Although every Tonga belongs to a clan and once it was dogma that every human belonged to a clan, clans as such do not form ritual communities. Clan members are dispersed and most neighbourhoods contain representatives of most clans recognized by the Tonga. Clanship stands for the importance of kinship, of matrilineal descent, and once perhaps for the interdependence of humans and the natural order, for each clan has its animal and sometimes plant totems and sometimes totems representing rain or soil or other physical elements. But a clan's totemic associates may differ from one region to another, a matter for comment and some amusement, and although clan names are more stable, few of the clan names found in Gwembe South are used elsewhere in Tonga-country. Nevertheless, using either clan name or an associated animal, it is possible to fit a newcomer into the

local system by equating his or her clan with one found locally. Migration therefore did not introduce new clans: twelve to fourteen clans served to place everyone.

Today most people, including educated urban youngsters, know to which clan they belong but many do not know its animal or plant associates. However, playing on rivalry between such associates still occurs among older people as part of the banter that goes on between members of clans paired in joking relationships (*bujwanyina*), now commonly referred to by the English term “cousins”. Clan joking relatives have their assigned responsibilities during funerals, and in the past they carried out the ritual shaming that cleansed people of offenses against morality such as incest (defined as sexual relationships within the clan), or attempted suicide. Clans therefore had a corporate office and a corporate personality, although they did not form corporate groups, and as joking partners of *katongo* holders, they play a role in communal as well as kinship rituals.

Despite this, clans are primarily conceptual categories used in sorting out relationships rather than social communities. I have said elsewhere, they “are categories in a system of classification which is inclusive of the human universe. To be recognized as a member of that universe you must be assigned membership in one of the categories of the system” (Colson 1954:26). I was given a clan and a father’s clan, to fit me into the system and on occasion, when more appropriate officiants were absent, have been asked as a clan member to perform ritual tasks, such as pouring water on a grave or calling out the ritual insults that greet mourners returning from bathing after a burial. On the Plateau I have also been asked as a representative of someone’s father’s clan to pour the offerings to the *mizimo* associated with the father and his line.

People distinguish between those who belong to their own descent group or lineage and those related only through clanship, though the same term is applied to both matrilineal descent group and clan. Plateau Tonga commonly refer to both as *mukowa* (*mikowa*, pl), Gwembe Tonga commonly use *luzubo* (*mazubo*, pl). Either term also means “kind”, “type”, “category”. In necessity, a clansman or clanswoman can be substituted for a lineage member for ritual purposes, but normally they are spectators rather than participants “because they do not share *mizimo*”. Members of a matrilineage, although they

may be dispersed in different neighbourhoods, consider themselves to be descendants of a common ancestress, whose name may not be remembered, and they have in common their relationship to the *mizimo* of the dead of the lineage. They are mutually dependent upon these *mizimo*, and a *muzimo* angered by one of them may afflict any member of the lineage to compel atonement. Any lineage member is a potential inheritor of the *mizimo* of its dead, and so lineage members see each other as potential inheritors of each other's spirits. Members, at least those within a reasonable distance, are expected to assemble for funerals and may be summoned for special offerings to the *mizimo* made on behalf of the matrilineage. Those living far away will be summoned if a senior man or woman dies, and the funeral postponed until they can arrive.

Each lineage also sees itself as ministering to a large number of non-members who are children and grandchildren of lineage men. These descendants are said to form a *lutundu* (*matundu*, pl), though some deny that children of daughters are members because *lutundu* members share the same blood and blood descends through males. It represents an extension through time of an ephemeral residential unit, the *mukwashi* which Machila (1989:xi) calls "A basic unit of Tonga social organization comprised of matrilineal kin [i.e. males], their wives, children and other dependents." Men and women who offer to lineage *mizimo* at spirit gates or in general appeals think of themselves as working primarily for these descendants, and spirit inheritors are frequently called upon to pour offerings at the doorways of men and women who are addressing the *mizimo* of father and father's father.

The *lutundu* was still of some importance in the 1990s in Gwembe Valley (Cliggett 1997:100), although when Christians refuse to make or attend offerings this group becomes more and more attenuated. Overall, it is also my impression that offerings at mass *lutundu* gatherings are now rare throughout Tonga country. Spirit gates are rare even in Central and North Gwembe where some who have inherited the obligation no longer build one. In Gwembe South, spirit gates were not built within living memory according to informants in 1957. Here, mass offerings were organized by spirit inheritors but carried out sequentially in the houses of members of the *lutundu*. These, however, have not taken place for several decades. The last I attended was in 1972. In 1982,

1992, and 1996 informants denied that they had been abandoned, saying that this lineage or that lineage had not organized such an offering in recent years for good reason, such as drought and lack of grain making it impossible to brew beer for the offering. It is true that in recent years droughts have been frequent and severe and crop failures common, and, in Gwembe South, few people even in a good year grow enough grain to carry them through until the next harvest. But in fact the lineage and its *lutundu* do not organize such offerings.

My description of such mass offerings is based on those I observed in Gwembe South prior to 1982. Here, as already noted, each lineage vests its *mizimo* in four members of the lineage: two men and two women chosen to represent the two generations into which the lineage is organized (Colson 1960:140ff). For the mass offering, members of the *lutundu* brewed beer to be ready on the same day. The lineage inheritors then went from house to house to invoke the blessing of the *mizimo* as they spewed out beer over the door posts, while their dependents – men, women and children – hurried after them to be present when the *mizimo* were summoned. Each inheritor entered in turn, (senior man, then senior woman, then junior man, then junior woman) took a sip of beer to spray out, then a sip of water which was also sprayed on the doorpost, called the names of the *mizimo*, and then exited not looking back.

Here, as in the work of the *katongo*, men and women were linked in a ritual dyad, but this time it was as members of the same lineage between whom sexual relationships are forbidden. Yet the house has sexual connotations. This may be why the inheritors worked sequentially and might not be in the house at the same time, but no informant gave this explanation.

Invocations everywhere had much the same format, but each who offered was free to add words or change the ordering. What should be included were the names of the *mizimo*. An invocation uttered by the senior male inheritor at a mass offering in Siameja Village in 1972 is typical:

With beer: All of you come.

Kausu, Mundondo*, Dropo*. All of you.*

Give Life.

Siantala and Bombolo*,*

There is none who is forgotten.

Sianenge, here is your beer.*

Join together, Simugande.*

All of you.

With water: Be cool, as water is cool.

Today we give thanks.

Asterisks indicate the names used in summoning the *mizimo*. Characteristically some were nicknames such as Kausu, "shirt", and Dropo "dorp" from the Afrikaans word for small town, taken while the men were labour migrants. Others are lineage names held by former members of their lineage, including the founders of the *lutundu*.

When the four inheritors had finished, the housewife gave a pot of beer to someone in the status of grandchild of the lineage, who distributed it to eager spectators, while those who were packed into the house hurried off to the next place of offering.

Elsewhere in Gwembe Valley and on the Plateau, the mass offering was usually made at the spirit gate standing in the homestead of an elder of the lineage, who has either inherited the *muzimo* of the previous builder or learned through divination that an ancestor who once had a gate wanted him to build one. For an offering at the gate, the owner acted with a woman of his lineage who handed him the ladle with which he poured the offering, although the beer is usually made by his wives and other women in his homestead. Once the offering was completed, all included in the offering followed the gate owner and his woman associate through the gate into the homestead. Here, even more clearly than in Gwembe South, the setting of the offering created the image of an ancient homestead occupied by a big man with his wives, his children, his clients and his slaves, yet subordinate to the inheritance rights of his own lineage. In the ritual at the spirit gate, that community was being recreated.

On the Plateau, the spirit gate also emphasized that lineages are linked together in shifting alliances. Here, when a man built a spirit gate for his lineage, he added a second doorway for the spirits associated with his father's line. These were his special guardians even though he himself could not appeal to them. A third officiant besides the lineage pair was therefore required at Plateau offerings to represent the owner's father's lineage. The spirit gate was thus a reminder of the

homestead of the owner's childhood when he was reared under the authority of his father while at the same time it symbolized the continuity of his matrilineage.

It may be that each lineage once carried out an annual general offering. Some have claimed that this was obligatory just as all ritually recognized adults ought to make an annual offering to *mizimo* associated with them. In fact, mass offerings have always been rare events in my experience. Even those lineages which have held them have not done so annually, though diviners might attribute illness in the lineage or within the *lutundu* to their neglect. Lineages most likely to carry out a mass offering appear to be those with some claim to precedence as founding settlers or the heirs of former big men.

The Household as a Ritual Community

Most people participate in offerings primarily in a context that stresses the importance of the individual household.

Usually, a couple were finally recognized as forming an independent household only some years after marriage, when they had planted and harvested and planted seed from their own field and again had grain from that harvest. This meant usually that children had been born. It took this time for them to form an independent unit with grain enough to feed themselves and be able to brew for offerings. Their independence was signaled by providing the wife with her own firestones (*masua*), brought and installed by two women who represented her own and her father's lineage. She was then entitled both to cook independently and to brew beer. From now on the couple had a responsibility to give hospitality to *mizimo* as well as to the living (see Chapter Seven). It was then, according to Plateau theory, that they also could look forward to being recognized as *mizimo* in their own right when they died (Colson 1954). The firestones metaphorically stood for the marriage and went into the grave when either spouse died. A widow received new firestones when the *muzimo* of her husband was reintegrated with the living through the ritual of inheritance.

Each household established by a man was a distinct entity, for both practical and ritual purposes. The house of the first wife was placed under the special protection of his father (or his father's father if his father were alive), the next under the protection of a *muzimo* of his

own lineage, and subsequent ones again received their own guardians usually from among the *mizimo* of the husband's lineage. When offerings take place at a house, both husband and wife should be present. The very first offering should be to the *mizimo* associated with the husband, and only thereafter does the wife make beer for the *mizimo* associated with her father and her own lineage. From then on, husband and wife should each offer annually to assure the *mizimo* that they have not been forgotten and to ask for continued protection. In the 1940s and 1950s, households expected to brew beer for offerings at the time of the community celebrations of *luinde* of planting and harvest, when every household made beer for the ancestors and to host their neighbours. Those still making an annual offering are now more likely to time it to coincide with Christmas, a time of merriment and feasting throughout Zambia, whether or not people consider themselves Christians.

Offerings ought to be made also when the household moves to a new site or when either husband or wife returns from a prolonged absence. I have recorded offerings made when a man returned from prison, or from serving in the army, or from labor migration. But most commonly, offerings take place because people are worried and a divination has found that a particular *muzimo* is angry and must be appeased. In the latter case, the divination is tested. Grain is put to soak in a pot of water placed near the doorway, a first step in the process of making beer. An offering of water from this pot is then poured. If the sufferer feels better the following morning or has a favorable dream, beer is brewed. If not, they look for another explanation.

Those present at an offering usually include the couple, their children, and the ritual intermediary if one is needed. Others arrive to share the beer only after the offering is completed, but a dependent living in the homestead may be included in the request for protection, as I have been on occasion. Young couples who have yet to have their households ritually recognized, labour migrants and their accompanying dependents who have no grain, men who have lost their wives through death or divorce – these have no household in which offerings can take place. Spirit inheritors have the duty to offer for them, having beer brewed in their own homesteads with their own grain and there making the offering. Christian converts who no longer feel that they may approach the *mizimo* directly, may also ask spirit inheritors to act

for them when divinations attribute illness within their families to anger of neglected *mizimo*. Women once given the right to brew beer for the spirits continue to hold this right. Their household is not thought to be destroyed on divorce or the death of a husband, but the widowed or divorced Plateau woman, who now owns her house, shifts her place of offering from the center post of the house or the bedposts to the door posts. The Gwembe widow or divorcee continues to pour where she always has, over the doorsill.

Invocations at household offerings may be as elaborate as the one made at the mass offering at Siameja, but usually fewer spirits are summoned. If the offering is the result of a divination, probably only the angry *muzimo* is summoned, unless the divination has specified that it wants to receive beer along with certain other spirits. Or it may be asked to bring with it others of the lineage. The invocation may be very brief and be no less effective. On one occasion a very old woman said only the following:

With beer: All of you drink.

With water: Siatukede and Mukasika,

Here is your beer.

Another typical invocation went:

With beer: Sialumwe, Kandela, Siampambo, Siambabala,

Here is your beer. Drink.

Bring those whom I have forgotten and their kin.

Drink. Be satisfied.

With water: Be cool.

Those who offer approach the task idiosyncratically. Sometimes they appear to be thinking of the *mizimo* addressed as known entities; sometimes they do not. The warm voice of an old woman who is summoning the spirit of her dead sister is an expression of intimate feeling for a known being expected to respond in kind. Others address unfamiliar dead of whom they know nothing save their names. Young men being coached in their first offering sometimes clown. Once, in 1962, a very angry small boy in Gwembe South, who had been made an inheritor as an emergency measure and resented the fact because none of his friends were inheritors, screamed abuse while his elders held his hand around the gourd from which the beer was being poured. Neither the clowning nor the anger was considered important.

What was important was that beer had been made, and the *mizimo* summoned by name to receive it.

Often little is remembered about the person summoned as a *muzimo*, although those most likely to be named in divinations and therefore invoked are those belonging to the parental and grandparental generation (see Colson 1960:150 for information on Gwembe in 1956-57). What is remembered of their lives, other than their particular skills, is irrelevant although some *mizimo* may be said to be capricious or always discontented and ready to cause trouble, while others are said to be calm and easily satisfied. A person becomes a *muzimo* not because of any particular authority or esteem while alive, but because of having lived and acquired status through marriage and the birth of children. *Mizimo* differ primarily in the number of their descendants, as this determines their sphere of influence.

Calhoun (1980:313), writing of the Tallensi of Ghana, argues that death makes it possible to idealize the ancestors: "to have them represent lineage values as opposed to personal interests". The Tonga do not idealize the dead. They respect and fear their power. They rebuke them for neglect and threaten them with the loss of those who give them hospitality, reminding them that they will then wander homeless in the bush, becoming no more than ghosts. Nor do they see themselves as helpless before a united spirit community. Whereas Tallensi ancestors are expected to form a common front in maintaining discipline among their descendants, the Tonga consider the *mizimo* as divided among themselves. Some will support when others seek only to punish. The *mizimo* of one's father's line should support one against the *mizimo* of one's own lineage: "they seek to give life when the others want only to kill."

Ritual Intermediaries

It must be emphasized that no household ever becomes completely independent as a ritual unit, just as it never becomes completely self sufficient in other respects. For some purposes, outside intermediaries are necessary. The rules that define when an intermediary is required and who should be chosen vary regionally. I doubt that I know all the variants, and the rules change as people become more mobile and more questioning. Nevertheless within each locality there appears to be some consistency.

On the Plateau, men and women obtain the right of direct approach to the spirits of their own lineage once they have been given the right to make beer at their own house, but they never receive the right to summon the *mizimo* of their father's and grandfathers' lineages. When offering to them they must use an intermediary of the appropriate lineage. Preferably the intermediary will be the inheritor of the *muzimo* invoked. If he or she is not available, then anyone of that lineage may serve. If no member of the lineage is available, then a member of the clan can be asked to serve. On several occasions, as a member of the father's clan, I have been asked to serve. Still other substitutions take place. If the father was a foreigner, say a Bemba-speaker, then any Bemba could serve. When all else fails people request a member of a clan allied with their own as a joking partner to serve as representatives of the clan of a father or grandfather. Thus Plateau men and women must rely upon outsiders, but not on particular outsiders. They can always find someone who can serve in an emergency.

In Gwembe Central, among those resident on the Zambezi Plain, the *muzimo* inheritor is the appropriate person through whom to approach it. The inheritor is the holder of all intangible rights associated with the dead person, becoming father or mother to the children of the dead, grandparent of any grandchildren. This gives the inheritor claims upon "children" and "grandchildren". Whoever wishes to make an offering to the *muzimo* must invite the inheritor to officiate. For the first offering in a new household, the inheritor expects payment, but thereafter expects only a pot of beer.

So long as there are surviving children or grandchildren, the *muzimo* should continue to be reinherited as each inheritor dies in turn. Only with the death of the last grandchild is it likely to be forgotten. Even then, if the person during life had a particular skill or left valuable possessions, reinheritance may continue to validate the transfer of the skill or possessions. So the *mizimo* of hunters, canoe makers, drum makers, blacksmiths, potters, diviners, and earth priests continue to be reinherited even though it is believed that *mizimo* may also pass their skills to non-inheritors of their lineage and to descendants. Rifles, large iron pots, conus shells and perhaps a few other items continue to be linked to their original owners, handed on to each new inheritor in turn, though to my knowledge this is not true of such recent valuables

as ploughs, sewing machines, radios, and motor vehicles – these may be too short-lived to continue as markers of the contributions of the dead.

Gwembe Central offerings, therefore, usually involve the presence of an inheritor who serves as priest. If the inheritor is not available or refuses to come, the offering cannot be made. Some inheritors are willing to free ritual dependents who live at a distance. They do so by handing over a gourd ladle used in offering while at the same time informing the *mizimo* that henceforth the recipient will be the one to summon them. Most inheritors, however, cling to the right to offer as valuable property. Which it is, for it entitles the inheritor to respect, beer, and fees for services, as well as claims on bridewealth of daughters and granddaughters of the dead and on estates of children and grandchildren. But because in Gwembe Central inheritance of *mizimo* is distributed widely among the members of the lineage, people deal with a number of different inheritors in the normal run of events, as now this *muzimo* and now that is implicated through divination as desiring offerings. Equally, most men and women ultimately become inheritors although probably not if they are regarded as quarrelsome. Those who live in the same neighbourhood are intricately linked as inheritors of the *mizimo* of each other's fathers, mothers, grandfathers, grandmothers, mother's brothers, father's sisters, and various other kin, and so are ritually interdependent.

In the past, Plateau Tonga also arranged for the *muzimo* to be inherited and some still do, but in the 1940s they were likely to choose a child who acquired little as a consequence of being appointed the *muzimo* inheritor. Some years after a death, many people did not remember who the current inheritors of fathers and grandparents were. They did not summon them for offerings. This was not necessary, since any adult member of the implicated lineage can make the offering as described above. If the first approached refuses, someone else can be found. Given the fact that Plateau villagers were shifting cultivators until recently and their normal movement led to dispersal, their solution seems appropriate. No matter where they went they could always find someone to serve. But equally, no matter where they went they also had to create the kind of relationships that would permit them to summon outsiders to ensure their own ritual well-being. In Gwembe Central, where alluvial soils anchored large stable communities,

dispersal was less likely. Most marriages occurred within the neighbourhood. People expected the inheritors on whom they depended to live nearby until the Kariba resettlement scattered old communities.

In Gwembe South, inheritors also served as intermediaries, but here the vesting of the *mizimo* of the lineage dead in four inheritors gave them enormous power over their dependents. Here, land was in short supply, lineage control over fields strictly maintained, and land allocation centralized through the inheritors. When a man or woman died, the *muzimo* was attached to the inheritor of his or her generation within the lineage. Inheritors had the responsibility of offering for all members of the lineage and for all children and grandchildren of lineage men of their generation. They were also the ritual intermediaries called upon by members of linked lineages. These were lineages of the same clan who officiated for each other as *basilufulo*, "calabash guardians". When a new inheritor was installed, it was a "calabash guardian" who handed him or her the gourd ladle with which to make the first offering. When someone died, the spirit inheritors from "the calabash guardians" orchestrated the funeral. One of them anointed the lineage inheritor when the *muzimo* was brought back and instructed the new *muzimo* that it had now a new home.

In Gwembe South until 1958, inheritors controlled their lineage-mates, the land most prized by everyone until Kariba Lake inundated it, and the *matundu* composed of descendants of lineage males. They also exerted power over members of linked lineages. They controlled the occasions on which people assembled as members of lineages and *matundu*, just as they controlled the rituals by which the single household appealed to the *mizimo*. Until the uprooting associated with the Kariba resettlement put the power of the dead in question, people feared to challenge men and women believed to have about them a host of *mizimo* quick to uphold the rights of their inheritors because these were their own rights.

Dependence on the *mizimo* helped to organize three different groupings which people regarded as crucial to ordered human existence: lineage, family or household (*mukwashi*) and *matundu*. One, the lineage, is conceived of as persisting through time although its members are born and die. The household is a unit founded by a married couple

whose way of life will be perpetuated through their children, although the unit itself will disappear and reappear in the guise of the *lutundu*. Each man and woman is differentiated from other members of the lineage by unique links to descendants to whom they stand in a special potential relationship as protector, and upon whose hospitality their *muzimo* will have special claim. They are also differentiated from lineage mates by their descent from men of other lineages who have rights over them and to whose spirits they owe respect. Although husband and wife will offer to some of the same *mizimo* only if they are closely related – as they well may be on the Plateau and in the Gwembe hills where bilateral cross-cousin marriage is practiced – the regular place of offering is the doorway (or the centre post) which symbolizes the house and their union rather than the lineages of which they are members.

The cult of the *mizimo* recognizes the individual careers of the men and women who become *mizimo* in their turn, the crucial role of the household as the basic unit of subsistence and the place where children are begotten and reared, the equality of men and women as vehicles of spirit, and the ordering of individual lives through lineage membership. It also reflects the importance of skills once valued by the Tonga as basic to subsistence. This last means that the Tonga *mizimo* are far more than simple representatives of a genealogy as Calhoun suggests of Tallensi ancestral spirits (Calhoun 1980:311). They are believed to choose living representatives to perpetuate their special skills. Men say they have become hunters, canoe makers, drum makers, blacksmiths, weavers of the woman's fishing basket, diviners, herbalists, song makers, or sponsors of the local orchestra of *budima* drums because a *muzimo* has demanded this of them. The *muzimo* may be that of a father, grandfather, great grandfather, or that of a former member of the lineage. Women say that they have become potters, basketmakers, diviners, or song makers for the same reason. Any successful practitioner of such skills is assumed to have the backing of a *muzimo*, or perhaps several. They in turn owe respect and offerings to the empowering *muzimo* whatever their genealogical relationship. On the other hand, with reference to the respect owed to the *mizimo* of parents and grandparents and their siblings, genealogy is determinative.

In a sense all personal achievements are seen as dependent upon the *mizimo* and should be announced to them formally, while at the same time they are asked to protect newly acquired property or status. Marriage, signalled by the completion of marriage payments, calls for the new household to be formally presented to the *mizimo*. The naming of a newborn child places it in relationship to the *mizimo*. The man who acquires cattle safeguards them in a ritual performed at the cattle kraal, where a representative of his father's lineage names the animals and calls upon the *mizimo* to protect them. Canoes, ploughs, guns, large iron pots used for ceremonies, carts, wagons and most recently cars are similarly placed under protection. The new owner who procrastinates can expect to see his cattle die, the pot crack, the gun misfire, the car break down or be damaged in an accident. The *mizimo* will not protect these prizes from the envy and witchcraft of other people if they have not been properly notified and asked for protection. In this they behave like living men and women who also *ku-takata*, i.e. refuse to have anything to do with a matter if they have not been properly informed about it.

The Community of Affliction

Until recently every Tonga participated in the ritual community of the neighbourhood and the ritual communities formed by lineages, *matundu* and households. Only some joined in ritual communities based on common suffering, and such communities were also ephemeral, and were regarded as one of the innovations of the early twentieth century. Probably even their members considered them as of minor importance in comparison with the other three, although in them they found alleviation of suffering and the opportunity to display their creativity as dancers and actors.

Communities of affliction were composed of those who claimed possession by the same *masabe* spirit, but as new *masabe* spirits appeared and their curing dramas held the stage for the moment, previous communities of suffering were superceded, to be reinvoked only occasionally (Colson 1969, 1977; Luig 1999). On the Plateau in the 1940s, *masabe* gatherings were rare, but I saw both men and women treated for possession. In the 1950s in Gwembe Valley, *masabe* gatherings were common, although usually only during the dry season. Women

were the primary participants. Gwembe men began to be possessed by *masabe*, of the type known as *mangelo*, only after the upheaval of resettlement.

Until recently, Tonga-speakers did not develop organized groups of adepts, invigorated by the frequent initiation of new members, such as Turner describes for the Ndembu of Northwest Province (Turner 1962, 1968). In Gwembe South, where *impande* flourished for many years as the sole form of *masabe* and the treatment of each new sufferer reassembled the same group of those possessed (Weinrich 1977:84-90), the dance drama was elaborated, and full recovery required a sequence of performance. These were held in three different homesteads, as respect was sought first from 'fathers', then from 'lineage members', and finally from the 'husband' of the one possessed. But once initiated all adepts seemed equal. Elsewhere the rapid succession of *masabe* gave adepts no time to organize into permanent communities. Within a year or so of treatment, they reactivate their possession only in play.

Masabe performances require drummers, dancers, and a chorus to sing and clap which is usually composed of anyone who can be attracted to the site. It is important to have a large gathering, for this is seen as conducive to the success of the treatment, and those who are resting around evening fires are asked to come to help their ailing neighbours whether or not they themselves have ever been possessed. A member of the neighbourhood, and not necessarily someone who has been possessed, usually acquires knowledge of medicines needed in the cure and this knowledge is sold from neighbourhood to neighbourhood. When a new *masabe* is diagnosed, it is necessary to improvise the treatment, creating drum rhythms, songs and a drama to which the *masabe* will respond, as well as obtain medicine to force it to emerge. When this *masabe* is diagnosed in another neighbourhood, those who control knowledge of its nature will be summoned as experts and usually must be paid. Thereafter local drummers know the beats, all know the songs and associated drama, and someone will probably have purchased knowledge of the medicine.

Masabe spread from neighbourhood to neighbourhood, but adepts primarily worked only in their own neighbourhood, perhaps because in the past women were unwilling to travel any distance to participate

in *masabe*, especially as most performances took place at night. But in the 1960s, larger communities began to emerge which may reflect the new ease of travel with the spread of roads and motor transport. Those subject to *Mangelo* (angel) and *Manegro* (Negro) possession, which first appeared in the 1960s, have some kind of continuing dependence on those who first treated them, who in turn depend upon those who officiated at their own treatment. Some men and women then became recognized as permanent cult leaders, especially those who also claimed that the *Mangelo* or other possessing spirit gave them the power to divine, heal, and speak to *basangu*. They have built centres where they treat the ill and disturbed who come to them from both rural and urban areas and make appeals for rain (Machila 1989:104; see also Chapter Five).

In the late 1970s, came further elaboration with the appearance of *Bungelengele* and *Siamwiala*, which, like the earlier *Mangelo*, show evidence of contact with Pentecostalism. Some adepts incorporate the Bible into curing or divining sessions. In rural villages their curing sessions are very like those of the older *masabe*, although *Bungelengele* substitutes the ringing of a bicycle bell for the drums of *masabe*. Demands upon initiates, including providing themselves with a white cup and saucer for further initiation, have become standardized under cult leaders living in towns on the railway line, who in turn may have links with the Nzila Church which has spread from Northwestern Province to the line of rail. Van Binsbergen (1981:193ff) characterizes this as a form of regional cult with a central place through which new adherents are initiated. Those completing initiation into *Bungelengele* or *Siamwiala* are required to visit the cult centre for the final stage of cure and recognition and then are given notebooks and a "license" which makes them healers free to initiate others whose names are to be inscribed in their books. Periodically they should revisit the cult centre and there they join with strangers from many regions of Zambia with whom they share a common bond of suffering.

Despite, the emergence of these more organized cults of affliction, *masabe*, comparable to those of the earlier period, continue to appear. New ones were reported in 2001. They cater to the willingness to try various remedies but be permanently satisfied with none, which Ulrich Luig saw as underlying the fluidity of church membership in Gwembe South.

Divination and Community

Diviners may serve neighbourhood communities, as when people seek for the reasons why the rains have failed, but they may also be consulted by anyone from anywhere. Their clients pay them in grain, beads, and today commonly in cash. Those who operate as witchfinders demand cattle or other valuables, such as ploughs and bicycles as well as money. Diviners have the task of sorting out whether problems are due to a spirit force and if so which one and what it wants, or whether they are the work of a witch, or are due to the recoil upon the sufferer of medicine acquired for success. They operate openly. Those who consult them usually take witnesses and the divination takes place where people may stop and listen. In this, divination conforms to the rule that religious activities must be carried out in public.

The crucial characteristic of all diviners is the ability to study events and human nature, and place their findings among the probabilities accepted by their clients. Clients may doubt the truth of any particular divination. Some Tonga are sceptical of some diviners, especially those living in their own vicinity. Others are sceptical of divination itself. Diviners who live at a distance, especially those who have adopted elaborate techniques, are more likely to be listened to even by sceptics. Such men and women are consulted on the death of senior lineage members, or in the event of a series of deaths, or if a senior man or woman has a chronic illness for which local divinations have found no answer.

Wherever the diviner lives, and increasingly those most respected live in urban areas, the findings are expected to point back to the client's responsibilities to the spirits (*mizimo* or *basangu*) associated with home, or to the malice of immediate rivals or the ambitions of their kin. However distant the diviner is from the situation in which the difficulty arises, the findings are given credibility only if they can be related to the familiar universe, a characteristic also noticed of divinations within the Mutumwa churches to which many urban and some rural Tonga now belong (Dillon-Malone 1988). Those diviners who use mirrors or other gazing devices may even invite clients to gaze and see for themselves what has caused their misery. Diviners obviously do not encourage clients to explore a wide range of possible alternatives or to come up with novel explanations which then in turn

can be elaborated. This is too much to ask of them. Their clients do not want novelty. They want reassurance that what is happening falls within their own range of experience. In matters of life and death one does not happily venture into worlds of fantasy.

Divination, like established rituals, is therefore most effective when it evokes images associated with basic securities. Until very recently, this for most Tonga referred back to the comforts of the dwelling and the stir around its doorway as parents and other supporters carried out the rituals that ensured the support of the *mizimo* hovering close by, or it referred to the neighbourhood community gathered in its strength to work under the egis of a *basangu* to drive back or turn to human purposes those powers pertaining to the wilderness and the control of clouds and rains.

The majority of churches deny the power of diviners or associate them with demons and agents of Satan, just as they deny the existence of *mizimo* and *basangu* or characterize them as demons. Yet even the educated, including university graduates and professional people, continue to feel the need for explanation and reassurance that somehow there lies within human action the ability to ward off illness and misfortune. Diviners therefore continue to flourish, as do the Nzila and Mutumwa churches that incorporate within their rituals the identification of whatever forces are causing evil and the offering of practical suggestions on how these are to be overcome through appropriate action.

CHAPTER VII

RITUALS OF THE LIFE CYCLE

Transitions from group to group and from one social situation to the next are looked on as implicit in the very fact of existence, so that a man's life comes to be made up of a succession of stages with similar ends and beginnings: birth, social puberty, marriage, fatherhood, advancement to a higher class, occupational specialization, and death
(*van Gennep 1960:3*)

The Life Course

Many of the spiritual forces dealt with by the Tonga emerge from the human condition through the transformation of death: *mizimo*, *zelo* or *zilube*, most if not all *basangu*, and perhaps some *masabe*. Only *Leza* has never experienced death, the end towards which all human life proceeds and from which there is no turning back. But it was the *mizimo* who presided over the rituals that once marked passage through this life.

Of all Tonga rituals, those associated with death are the most elaborate, even more elaborate than the communal rituals of the annual cycle and appeals for rain. They have also been most resistant to change, as has been true elsewhere (Bockie 1993:126ff). Rituals associated with earlier life stages have largely been abandoned, no doubt because they no longer coincide with the status transformations that people themselves think most significant. Nor have they been effectively replaced by rituals drawn from the Christian repertoire or some secular progression. Death cannot be avoided, and people continue to need ritual in dealing with it. Because the funeral provides a summation of much Tonga thinking about the meaning of life, it will be dealt with at length in Chapter Eight. Here, I deal rather with the human career through which people create themselves and so, some say, the *muzimo* that emerges through death.

The Forward Thrust of Life

Despite the close association between child and the *mizimo* for which it is named (see below), the Tonga denied any belief in reincarnation. My article on the cult of the *mizimo* among the Plateau Tonga (1954) was unfortunately misread by Stefaniszyn who cited me as saying the opposite (1962:70). My evidence confirms Stefaniszyn's own research

on the Plateau in the 1940s: belief in reincarnation is absent. I think he is right to take issue with Smith and Dale (1920:vol 1:365; vol 2:180) who attributed such a belief to the Ila. Zuesse (1979:108-109) then extrapolated from what they said of the Ila to the religious beliefs and symbols of other people of central Africa, including the Tonga.

The Tonga consistently deny that the dead return as the living, for they see the human trajectory as moving always forward. Their narrative style allowed for no flash backs or second thoughts (Jones and Carter 1967). They see the human life course as irreversible, unlike West Africans who are reported to conceive of “the perpetual existence of life, in which there is a cycle of pregnancy, life, death and a period of waiting in a universal pool of spiritual existence with a subsequent state of reincarnation, by which it is possible to change one’s lot for better or worse” (Wiredu 1980:8).

Tonga assumptions differ also on two other themes reported by Wiredu as characteristic of West African and perhaps all African thought. The first holds that “man is born free from sin” and that “he remains so until he becomes involved in some polluting circumstances in life”. The second places higher sanctity on males than on females (1980:8). This second theme is echoed by Zahan, who sees African religion as primarily an affair of men, though he concludes that “its reasons for being is woman, guardian of life and link between the living and the dead, the past, and the future” (1979:31).

Of the first assumption, Tonga would agree that children are innocent of malice and their anger is quickly over, while cupidity, envy, and malice increase with age. They are common to adult men who see others as rivals or victims rather than as allies and friends. Men who develop in this fashion become dangerous witches (see Chapter Ten). Tonga also think that those who suffer are likely to envy, suspect and hate the fortunate. They thereby recognize the impact of the growth of ambition and the ambiguities inherent in human relationships. But they do not think in terms of “sin” or “polluting circumstances” in the way that Wiredu uses these words, though the increasing influence of Christian churches may be leading in this direction.

Pollution is a temporary affair. One can and should be purified from contact with death or those events grouped together as abominations (*malweza*, from the verb *ku-lwezya*, ‘to curse’). These include incest,

attempted suicide or suicide itself, but also the inadvertent collapse of a granary or other reminders of death. While under pollution, men and women are at risk of attack by angry *mizimo* or *basangu*. But people do not become more polluted over time nor are elders considered to be especially polluted. They may be dangerous because they have powerful medicines and because they are spirit inheritors whose wrath is communicated to the *mizimo*. One should never pass directly behind the back of an elder since medicines and *mizimo* hover there.

Women and Men as Religious Actors

Tonga religion is not primarily a thing of men. The status of women throughout Zambia probably declined during the twentieth century due to the patriarchal biases of western missionaries, colonial administrators, development workers, and Zambian men educated in the West who insist that women take their status from their roles as mothers and housewives. In the past, Tonga women certainly emphasized the importance of fertility and their rights over their children, but they were also certain of their own value as persons and their right to participate fully in religious life.

Women were no more likely to be polluted or polluting than men. While menstruating they were expected to observe certain restrictions on their behavior. They should not handle guns or hunting spears. Some did not add salt to food or hand food directly to their husbands or other males. In the past they did not plant ground peas (*inyemu*) at such times, though no one could say why. Some men would not sleep on the same bed with a menstruating wife. Pregnant and menstruating women ought not to touch or closely approach a newly born infant. Among western Plateau Tonga, a woman who miscarried or had a still birth was regarded as polluted until she had been cleansed, but those on the eastern Plateau and within Gwembe Valley showed little concern about such matters until the recent spread of the belief that a man becomes ill with AIDS as a result of sleeping with a woman who has aborted and not been cleansed (Mögensen 1995). Otherwise, during pregnancy and for the first months after giving birth, women observe various taboos for the welfare of themselves and their infants, most of which the husband should also observe to keep wife and infant from harm.

The Tonga, in the past, did not make great play with sexual dichotomies that stress the separateness of male and female or have that highly developed code of oppositions reported from elsewhere (Needham 1973). While right is associated with male and the paternal line, and left with female and the maternal line, only Plateau people systematically use this to structure ritual and spatial alignments. Women who menstruate should not slaughter domestic animals, on the grounds that they give birth. On the other hand, the Tonga associate blood with the male, for blood is derived from the father and those who form a *lutundu*, as descendants of males of a lineage, are said to share one blood.

Zuesse (1979:94-95) also claims that many peoples of Central Africa, with whom he places the Tonga, associate women with the west, men with the east; women with death, men with life; women with the bush, men with settlement; women with primal space, men with time: "the female is the one associated with the earth, the land, and the aboriginal, the male is the conquering hero and ancestral king who institutes real history". None of this applies to the Tonga and may not apply elsewhere, for Morris (2000) gives a different pattern for the people of Malawi, who associate men with the bush and women with the homestead.

Sexuality

Sexuality is explicitly associated with heat and fire, for the firesticks used in making fire at a new homestead are called male and female. In their invocations to the *mizimo*, Tonga ask them "to be cool, as water is cool". This is because heat is also associated with such dangerous emotions as anger, and with blood and physical violence. At the same time, it suggests some of the ambivalence that surrounds sexuality, which is seen as a necessary and desirable source of blessing, but also as a source of potential trouble, but even about this last there is ambivalence. After all, some things desired by people are gained through illicit sexual acts. It is through incest within the lineage that some hunters empower the hunting medicines that bring people desired meat, but these same medicines may then take the lives of both the hunter and his kin. Sexual activity regarded as illicit can also cause trouble when engaged in by inheritors of *mizimo*, for a *muzimo*

is said to grow angry if its inheritor “sleeps in the bush”, a euphemism for taking a lover. The sexuality of adults was also considered dangerous to children. Various illnesses and even death are attributed to *impela*: i.e., an adult has harmed the child by having intercourse with it.

But overall the emphasis is upon sexuality as a positive good. Earlier I pointed out that much of the meaning of Tonga ritual derives from the assumption that the human condition involves marriage and the procreation of children. This is the appropriate career for all who survive to maturity, and even a woman whose disabilities make marriage impossible is not denied the right to bear children. Sexuality, although banned on some occasions, is seen as good and a pleasure which both men and women ought to enjoy. That women take pleasure in sensual play is accepted and regarded as no more dangerous to an orderly universe than the sensual enjoyment of men, though men are given much greater license since they may marry a number of wives and assume the right to pursue affairs outside of marriage. Legitimate sexuality, however, is intimately linked to the domestic sphere. It should take place within the dwelling, a granary, or a field shelter. If it takes place elsewhere it is spoken of as an affair of the bush, for the bush offers cover to covert affairs, and a child born out of marriage is spoken of as a child of the bush. In some families, a small pot (*cibia cabwiinga*) is given to a woman at the time she is sent in marriage. Kept beside the bed, it is used for cleansing after intercourse. On her death, the pot goes into her grave.

Sexuality is also required in rituals that guide activities considered to be basic to human existence: those of the agricultural cycle, where seed is given potency through the sexual union of earth priest and his ritual wife (see Chapter Six). It is an act of sexual intercourse, surely symbolizing both the possibility of new life and the return to normal domestic routines, though called an act of cleansing (*kusalasya*), that brings the funeral to an end and precedes the recognition and installation of the new *muzimo* as a guardian of its kin.

The occasions where sexual relations are banned stand outside the normal routine. Men must avoid sexual contacts when they are about to begin hunting, smithing, or other specialized activities that set them apart, just as women who plan to make pottery should sleep apart from their husbands. Here, diviners are exempt from the rule,

for they must serve consultants when they arrive. Abstinence is required after the birth of a child, until it is somewhat able to fend for itself, for it must be weaned as soon as the mother knows herself to be pregnant, given that the milk of a pregnant woman is thought to be dangerous to a nursing child. In Gwembe South, as late as 1957, some couples obtained permission from the midwife before resuming intercourse, the fee paid her being known as *kutaluka* (to cause to begin). Men and women should also sleep apart at funerals until after life begins to flow back into the homestead as the funeral progresses. On some other occasions, any suggestion of active sexuality was considered inappropriate to the task at hand. Little girls were sent running through the fields of growing crops to bless them with aspersions of water or beer: young boys were sent to spend the first night in a new homestead before the general move to the new site and the lighting of the first fire in the new homestead. People said this was both because such children were not sexually active and were too young to have malice.

Envisioned Careers

In the past, people shared the same vision of a satisfactory career. Men wanted to have their own homesteads, a number of wives, many children, and many livestock. Women wished for marriage and many children and grandchildren. And of course, both wished for health and good harvests. These were things that everyone wanted, but they might also have individual skills that differentiated them. I am uncertain whether the Tonga thought a child predestined at birth to a given life path. They certainly did not have the belief, so common in West Africa, that a soul chooses its destiny before birth (Fortes 1959:20-23). On the other hand, I think they might say that certain characteristics are laid down at birth and these are determinative.

One is born male or female, and despite ritual equality, men and women have different social roles and different expectations of life. Here one cannot be other than one is. I know of only two instances of Tonga attempting to change gender. One was a Plateau woman who dressed and lived as a man; the other was a Plateau man who dressed and lived as a woman. Each was said to have been directed to do so by a *muzimo*, assumed to have behaved in the same fashion when

alive. Homosexuality was regarded as a resource adopted by some men while away at work and abandoned when they came home where they could mate with women. Various accidents and illnesses of labour migrants were said to be due to the witchcraft of men angered because they refused "to be used as a woman" (e.g., Colson et al 1991:36). I know of a very few men who were active homosexuals after their return. This was assumed to indicate that they were witches, just as incest is associated with witchcraft. I have not heard of women being identified as lesbians though I know a number of women who avoid sexual intercourse, an avoidance usually seen by other women as due to fear of pregnancy and childbirth.

One's life career to a lesser extent is influenced by birth into a particular lineage and clan, and as the child of a man of particular lineage and clan. These are attributes theoretically unchangeable, which remain through life and even after death, for *mizimo* retain their lineage and clan affiliations. Recognition of such placement, however, does not give rise to a sense that one is predestined to a particular life course in the West African sense. This may reflect the fact that, until recently, Tonga society was basically egalitarian with little social stratification. Ideas about reincarnation and prenatal choice of destiny provide a means by which people can come to terms with the existence of inequality. Most West Africans have long lived in an environment where the physical world is seen as dominated by human beings among whom status differences loom large. Beyond any peculiar misfortunes, people must also come to terms with their assignment to positions within the social hierarchy: their right to learn a craft, to compete for various secular and sacred offices, to acquire certain kinds of knowledge, can depend upon their birth. Even access to land and so the possibilities of relative affluence were determined by birth into land owning units and by birth order within such units.

Tonga clans are not ranked and confer no distinctive rights upon their members. It is also fair to say that Tonga are aware that clan membership is not necessarily determined by birth. In the nineteenth century those taken captive or sold as slaves were absorbed into the clans of their captors and owners. Those who fled to another region might adopt the clan of the patron who helped them settle in the new community, and change again if they moved on. Today, clan membership

probably is fixed by birth, though many may suspect that it derives from a former incorporated slave. But while people still know their clans, many, especially those settled in towns, no longer consider clanship to be important, and marriage with members of one's own clan occasionally takes place.

Lineage membership today is also relatively unimportant in determining life chances. Even in the past, it had no such determining influence as in much of West Africa. While only those summoned by empowering *mizimo* were expected to be successful in hunting or in practising a given craft, it was assumed that practitioners of most crafts had existed in most lineages in the past, and that their *mizimo* would summon new adepts when it pleased them. I was present in 1963 when a Central Gwembe elder challenged a divination that found he was required to become a canoe maker. He said he knew of no canoe makers among his ancestors or in his lineage. Friends overrode the objection, insisting "every lineage has canoe makers", and that if he had forgotten the *mizimo* had not.

While only someone born into the lineage (and so the clan) that held the *katongo* rights in a neighbourhood could become a *sikatongo*, oral histories show neighbourhoods vesting the duties of *sikatongo* in new leaders belonging to other lineages, and when members of a community berate a *sikatongo* for failure in his duties, they may say that he and his lineage can be replaced. In any event, membership in a *katongo* lineage means little in practice today and gives few privileges. In the past many lived outside the area in which their lineage held *katongo* rights.

In the 1940s and 1950s, when children from about the age of six were given their own small fields, every adult was expected to have fields and to work them. This included *basikatongo* and *basangu* mediums. Only in the densely settled Zambezi plain were differentials in field fertility significant, and access to the best land vested in lineages. Here, one's life chances did vary with birth into a lineage with large or small holdings of alluvial land. For those with little possibility of acquiring such land, emigration to the hills or Plateau might be a bitter choice. Emigration, however, did provide an alternative, and men and women did not need to live out their lives within their birth neighbourhoods. Nor were those who received alluvial fields secure in their possession, given the vagaries of the Zambezi flood and the

frequency with which fields were washed away and soil deposited elsewhere.

Other sources of advantage were rare. In Gwembe South, hereditary chieftainship may have existed prior to colonial rule (Matthews 1976): it was there that elderly people boasted of being children of chiefs and said that only they and members of the chiefly lineage were permitted to wear leopard skins. Hereditary chieftainship may also have existed in one or two places on the Plateau, though this is less certain. But for the most part, chiefs and headmen were appointed by colonial administrators from among such local leaders as they could find. The offices continue to vest in their lineages, though it may be rumoured that one or other current incumbent descends from a slave affiliate of the lineage. Headmanships, however, could be created, and any ambitious man able to attract a few followers was able to gain recognition as a headman during the colonial period and at some periods after independence (1964-1973, 1991-). Once created, the office again vested in the founder's lineage. Access to the chiefly office was more restricted. Initially the colonial government recognized many chiefs, each ruling only a few people: so little was the office valued that in many instances people put forward a slave as a sacrificial offering to government. Only when chiefs began to be paid and were given courts and messengers did this change, and intense competition develop over who should hold the office. By the 1940s, however, most chieftaincies had been demoted to senior headmen, leaving the few who remained with jurisdiction over many villages. In 1964, after Zambian independence, their power was much restricted: chiefs were then expected to represent the historic past rather than serve as administrators and judges. This changed after 1991, with the demise of the single-party system, when chiefs again exercised very real power, especially with respect to the allocation of land. But, for much of the twentieth century, those with ambition were likely to see more possibilities in administrative positions associated with the district or central governments than in becoming a headman or chief.

If birth itself in the past was of little significance in determining what one might become, this is changing with the social differentiation that now marks Zambian society even in the rural areas. Children born to parents who were among the first to go to school, were in a

position to advance rapidly into responsible well paid positions at the time of Zambian independence. Their children in turn have greater access to secondary education and other advantages than most rural children or the children of the impoverished proletariat in the cities (Scudder and Colson 1980: Carmody 1992:135ff). Increasingly those who gain admittance to Zambian universities are drawn from the children of the elite, and with a larger burden of university costs being placed on the private resources of students, few but the children of the elite can afford higher education. Zambian society is becoming increasingly stratified. But individual advancement in this society is not seen as being within the realm of the *mizimo*, who represent a very different life pattern. Instead, especially for the losers, it becomes an arena where success depends on personal medicines and witchcraft.

Rites of Passage

The sequence of rituals that marked an individual's movement through life (*buumi*) began even before the recognition that the child was human, and so under the protection of the *mizimo*. These rituals focused on birth, first public appearance of a newborn, first tooth, a boy's first successful hunt, a girl's first menstruation, marriage, establishment of a household, birth of first child, inheritance of a *muzimo*, and, of course, establishment in a craft.

Rituals of Acceptance

A child is born with *muuya*, 'life force' (see Chapter Four). People differ on whether it has *muuya* from the moment the mother is aware of its existence, but from that moment, she should take measures to safeguard it. These include avoiding contact with the sexuality of others and controlling her own sexuality. *Muuya* is often translated as "soul", but it did not have this meaning originally, nor did the possession of *muuya* ensure that the child was recognized as human or had the right to live. Abortion was an option. Ziwa (2004:166), generalizing about Zambia, says, "The belief that the dead can come back to influence the living does not include a foetus/child. Whether the foetus is aborted or not, it can cause no harm to society" (2004:166). In fact, children had to prove their humanity.

In Gwembe South, pregnant women and babies without teeth were not permitted to enter a house during an offering to the *mizimo*

because the humanity of the child was in doubt. Elsewhere, foetus and infant were given the benefit of the doubt and included in the offering. A child born feet first, with a caul or a tooth, or heard to cry out before birth, was considered to be the embodiment of a bush creature and destroyed. Its body was thrown into the bush, or into the Zambezi. Multiple births were also anomalies in most Tonga communities, although not apparently in the Macha area on the Plateau (Davidson 1915). All of a set of triplets were destroyed at birth. In the case of opposite sex twins, the male was destroyed; if both children were of the same sex, the last born was destroyed. Their bodies too went to the bush. In Plateau villages where I lived in 1946-47, the oldest set of twins I encountered were about six years old. In Gwembe villages in 1956-57, the oldest twins encountered were one year old at Musulumba in the Gwembe Central hills, and three years old at Nangamba in a river village near Kanchindu Mission in Gwembe South. No twins were living either in Chezia neighbourhood in Gwembe Central or Siameja neighbourhood in Gwembe South. Even in the 1990s not all Gwembe people were prepared to regard the birth of twins as normal or acceptable, though it was no longer common to dispose of one at birth. On the other hand, one twin might die of neglect within a month or two, for women are acutely aware of the drain upon their bodies of trying to nurse and care for two infants. They are also aware that caring for twins seriously reduces their ability to produce a crop and handle other obligations. Despite this, many now survive. Scudder's field notes also record the survival of sets of triplets in Mazulu Village in the 1990s. I have not encountered them elsewhere.

Despite the agreement that it was common to destroy one twin at birth, Davidson reported that this was not followed in the Macha area in the second decade of the twentieth century and it is possible that elsewhere both twins were occasionally allowed to live. In 1963 I was introduced to a Plateau woman in her 70s whose twin sister also survived. It was then explained that if a woman continued to give birth to twins, it was accepted that *mizimo* wanted her to bear and rear both children. The Tonga have long since thought about what may be involved when both twins survive. Their conclusions illuminate their understanding of both *muuya* and *muzimo* as somehow evolving through life experience. But I only learned of this in the 1990s when I

first heard Gwembe people argue that if a twin dies and leaves a survivor, it may not be mourned until the survivor also dies for they are really one person and share a common *muuya*.

Diary, Musulumba, January 1995

At the funeral of the wife of AC, her lineage and her husband's lineage sat together to think what to do: "We cannot have the funeral because she was a twin and one is still alive and she will die." Her father was very angry and said, "Why don't you want to mourn my child?" People who are born two are mourned. It would not be mourned if it were a small child. Someone big who has already had children is mourned.

(Benard Simalabali)

In 1996, a Gwembe South elder halted the funeral of a two-year old child on the grounds that its twin was still alive. He said that until they were married and had children, twins share a single *muuya* and give rise to only one *muzimo* after death. Mourning would therefore kill the survivor. In many other ways, according to Benard Simalabali of Musulumba, twins had to be treated as though they were one person:

Diary, Musulumba Village, August 1996

If a Tonga has twins and wants to buy clothes for them, you must buy for them both together on the same day and the cloth must be of the same kind. Also if you are beating one twin, then you should beat its fellow so it will also cry. ...If one twin is beaten by other children when the other is not there, then it comes and will start wailing until they both stop. So the Tonga say that if one twin dies, one should not mourn because one remains and it will be taken by its dead twin if it is mourned. ...If the one that remains does not die, it will have much sense, much wisdom. ...If the twins are girls, they should be placed in puberty seclusion at the same time and sleep together on the bed. Long ago, up to the 1950s, they said if a man came to marry a twin, he married both. He could not marry just one, because the one who remained would be angry at staying alone in the village. It would want to stay with its fellow until both were pregnant.

Twins, therefore, appear to share the same *muuya* only while still young, before they have been differentiated through life, before they have begun to develop separate personalities and separate spheres of activity linked to their own marriages and the birth of children. All this suggests that *muuya* is a dynamic process, expanding and changing during life, just as it is transformed at death.

Until it cut its first tooth, a child was said to be like the toothless monitor lizard (*nabulwe*). Its status was uncertain. If its mother died while it was still completely dependent upon her milk, it was put in the grave with her, for a woman did not nurse the child of another. If a child cut an upper tooth first, it was destroyed as a bush creature and its body went back to the bush, even though by then it had become an individual to its mother and others close to it. A child was once given names associated with *mizimo* only after the first tooth appeared. If it died before this, it was buried by old women without any public mourning (See Chapter Eight). Only after the appearance of teeth, was the child considered human even though it had previously been ritually introduced to the world on first being brought from the birth hut.

By the 1960s, children born without anomalies appeared to be accepted as fully human at birth, though their membership is still regarded as precarious. Despite the spread since the 1960s of health centres and under-five clinics with special feeding programmes for the malnourished, too many children die in infancy to expect that birth leads to a mature individual (Clark et al. 1965). Moreover, many do not think life should be preserved at all costs. I have known elderly Tonga complain about efforts to save the life of a premature or frail infant. They said one should recognize that one sows both bad and good seed. In planting, several seeds are sowed together and only the strong plant is saved. So it should be with children. In 1972, when a premature Central Gwembe baby was taken to a hospital where an incubator gave it a chance to live, an elder said the parents were foolish: the child should be allowed to die, and the parents should try again to create strong children from good seed. Others said that premature infants and those with little vitality embodied alien forces, or ghosts, and had no right to be nurtured into human life.

I think that in some rural areas, anomalous births, other than twins, may still be treated as belonging to the bush, and immediately

disposed of in the bush. But the spread of health centres, with supporting services including weaning foods, as well as the Christian value placed on life as an end in itself, have led many to think that infants are human from the moment of birth even though membership within the Christian community is officially conferred only by baptism. A Siameja elder, talking of their former practice of disposing of unrecognized children, said, "We would never do this now to anyone who had life (*buumi*)."

Life (*buumi*) includes, but involves something more than *muuya*. The *muuya* is unique to the child: it is not derived from either mother or father. Blood, however, is commonly regarded as contributed by the father, while bone comes from the mother, although the last is denied by those who say a woman is "only a sack" in which the father's semen is nourished into the blood and bone of the child. Matriliny did not mean that the Tonga discounted the link between father and child. It was essential that a child have a father, and the child in the womb was thought to be strengthened as it received further semen when its parents continued to have intercourse during pregnancy. If an unmarried girl became pregnant, she was usually sent to live with her lover so that the child could be strengthened, only to return home for the actual birth. I have also known of instances where a husband told the lover who had impregnated his wife that he should continue to visit her during her pregnancy. Intercourse with other than the father of the child in her womb was likely to injure it, and to cause difficulties in childbirth. For either father or mother to approach an infant after engaging in intercourse, especially with some other partner, was likely to make the child ill with *masoto*, unless it was first protected by medicines. The mother also observed various food taboos and other avoidances in order to protect the child (Moonga et al. 1997).

The proper place for a woman to give birth to her first child was the house of her mother, or at least some close kinswoman. Later children were born in the house of their father. In Gwembe South, when a woman went into labour, the house was cordoned off with strips of raffia, which remained until the child was able to be brought from the house, a week or so after birth. The strips warned the sexually active not to approach. If labour was prolonged, midwives began to call out

the names of various *mizimo*, asking each "Are you the one?" When the right name was called, the child was expected to be born, and it was this name that it would later receive as its *muzimo* name. Until the navel cord fell off and was buried by the doorposts, the newborn remained in the birth hut. Then a bit of hair was cut from the head, and it was brought from the house in a carrying cloth provided by its father. It came on its mother's back, and remained there while she was formally reintroduced to her daily tasks of stamping and cooking. In the case of the first child, it was the father's sister who came bringing the cloth provided by the father, and it was she who carried the child on her back during the journey to the father's homestead. This proclaimed paternity.

In the past it was only when the child cut its first tooth that it was named, and only then would it be mourned. On the Plateau, the father's side first bestowed the name of one of their *mizimo*, at the same time placing a bead wristlet on the right arm, for the right arm was associated with the father. Thereafter, kin on the mother's side gave the child the name of a *muzimo* of that lineage, placing a bead wristlet on the left arm. It was this name that was identified with the child through life and would be the name of its *muzimo* after death. The name associated with the father's side lapsed at death (Colson 1954). In Gwembe Valley, a child usually received only one *muzimo* name, bestowed alternately by the mother's and father's kin. *Mizimo* for whom the child was named were expected to act as its guardians through life, and in turn, once fully adult, the child should nourish them with offerings.

Removal of the Upper Incisors

In the past all Tonga boys and girls had the front upper incisors removed, usually before puberty. People said it was necessary to teach children to bear pain, especially girls who would have to bear the pain of childbirth. It was also said that it was done because people should be like cattle, domestic animals that have no upper teeth, rather than like zebras, creatures of the wild. This explanation, given by Plateau elders in the 1940s, echoed what was said to Father Moreau, the founder of the Jesuit mission at Chikuni, at the beginning of the twentieth century and to Frances Davidson, the founder of Macha Mission (Moreau 1950; Davidson 1915:403). The explanation

plays upon the dichotomy between homestead and bush that runs through so much ritual. It seems to link also to the act of *ku-luma* ('to bite'). incorporated in many rituals.

Operators, who used a chisel, received their skill from *mizimo*. A child went alone, or several went together, taking a small basin of meal as payment. I have no evidence that the parents informed the *mizimo* when the child set out or returned, or if there was public rejoicing. Yet, the loss of the teeth was seen as mandated by the *mizimo*. Siblings should be operated upon in strict birth order, according to their sex, just as they expected to marry in that order. To forestall an older sibling was a threat to that person's future fertility. Gwembe women in 1956/57 still argued that it was an abomination (*malweza*), for a girl to become pregnant while she still had her teeth: they were appalled at the 1951 Native Authority order which banned the operation. In 1957 I attended a public hearing in Chezia, a Central Gwembe neighbourhood, called because two girls defied the order and persuaded a local man with the necessary skill to take their teeth. He was made to pay a small fine. This outraged many of the listeners even though Gwembe boys began to refuse to undergo the operation by the 1920s. They said it was because they could not stand being taunted by people they met while labour migrants in what was then Southern Rhodesia. They feared their jeers more than they feared the anger of the *mizimo*.

Some Plateau boys in the Macha area were likewise refusing by 1915 for much the same reason (Davidson 1915:402), but as cash cropping replaced the need for labour migration from the 1920s on, Plateau boys were less exposed to non Tonga opinion. The majority of them began to refuse to have their teeth removed only several decades later as they attended mission schools and came under the influence of missionaries. Plateau girls, who were more under village discipline and less apt to be in school, continued to follow the dictates of their mothers even in the 1940s until the practice was banned by order of the local authority, under pressure from colonial officers. By that time, moreover, young men were anxious to take their wives with them to work and did not want them made conspicuous by the lack of teeth. This some corrected by finding a dentist and paying for a bridge.

Puberty Rituals

When a boy made his first significant kill, he brought it to a senior man in his lineage or to his father's father, who made an offering with water to inform the *mizimo*, and a meal was cooked to honour the boy. Otherwise, except for the removal of the upper incisors, a boy's maturation went unmarked by the 1940s. There may once have been other formal acknowledgements of his progress. A few Plateau elders said that formerly a boy took tobacco to his seniors who in turn gave him the right to smoke, and some said that the boys of a village or a neighbourhood did this as groups of age-mates (*misela*). Others there and in Gwembe Valley denied any ritual associated with a boy's advance into early adulthood. The right to drink beer came only after marriage. By the 1940s and 1950s, boys looked upon labour migration and the receipt of a *citupa* (identify card), as signalling adulthood.

A girl's maturation was celebrated on the Plateau and in the hills and among Zambezi River people in Gwembe North, but not among the river people of Gwembe Central and Gwembe South. Where it was celebrated, it involved the community at large. It was important to her lineage, for her fertility guaranteed its continuity; and to her father, who through her would gain bridewealth, a son-in-law, and grandchildren; and to others in the community, for the girl's marriage would create new ties of affinity that would reorder the community. It was celebrated with rejoicing by family, kin, and neighbours. It was also a matter of concern to the *mizimo*.

The best evidence for their involvement comes from Gwembe hill villages where not all girls were secluded. If one parent came from the Zambezi River area where seclusion was not practised, then one daughter was secluded, the next was not, and so on down the line of daughters, thus acknowledging the custom of each parent. But if a woman who had not been secluded proved barren or her children died soon after birth, divination was likely to attribute this to the anger of the *mizimo*, especially the one associated with her name, who were demanding that she be secluded. The woman then went through *inkololo*, the rituals of seclusion and formal emergence into adulthood. The term is derived from *lukolo*, "breast", *inkolo*, "breasts", the manifest sign that a woman was ready for child bearing.

On the Plateau and in hill villages, seclusion usually followed on first menstruation, although it might take place even earlier when the girl's breasts began to rise and she showed other signs of maturation. This allowed her kin to choose a time when there was adequate food for the girl, for whatever else was involved in seclusion, everyone agreed that one of its purposes was to allow the girl to grow plump and attractive. Good feeding and rest also meant that her fertility was enhanced and she was likely to become pregnant quickly when sent to her husband, as once happened when she emerged from seclusion. Most women did become pregnant quickly. The Tonga fertility rate was and is high, in the range of six live born children per woman who completes the child bearing years. In the 1940s and 1950s I encountered very few barren women. In consequence, Tonga rituals did not show the same preoccupation with infertility that permeated the rituals of people such as the Ndembu Lunda where birth rates were low by Tonga standards (Turner 1968:52ff.; E. Turner 1987).

During the sequence of *inkolola*, a girl moved from the status of *musimbi*, "girl", to that of *kamwale* or *mooye*. Collins (1962) glosses both words as "initiated girl", but in my experience the terms are used as soon as the girl enters seclusion: *mooye* is more commonly used at this stage, while *kamwale* commonly refers to a woman between puberty and the birth of her first child. The sequence began when the girl was told to run to hide in the bush, where she was caught by a senior woman. Her captor carried her to the house of seclusion, where she would stay for a period varying from a few days to three or four months, depending upon family resources, although if a death occurred in the homestead she was brought out without ceremony and *inkolola* terminated. Seclusion of the first daughter was usually in the house of a member of her father's lineage, that of the next in the house of someone of her own lineage, and so on down the line of daughters. The initiate was attended by a younger girl, the *syakamwale*. Both were rubbed with oil and red ochre, which in this context can be interpreted as a sign of joy and life. The girl passed the long hours of the day playing on a pressure drum (*namalwa*) or a horn trumpet (*lweembe*). By the 1940s, when many houses had plastered walls, she might amuse herself by drawing upon them with colored chalk. In the evenings children danced outside the door, while women

came to instruct her on ways to please her husband and lectured her on the need to conduct herself with propriety towards affines, her husband, and her own elders. But the teaching was minimal in comparison with that recorded for girls going through initiation rituals elsewhere in Zambia (Richards 1946; Stefaniszyn 1964:89-98; Turner 1967; E. Turner 1987:71ff).

In the very early morning on the day of her emergence, the girl was taken in a procession of singing women and children to be bathed. This cleansed her of the dirt of seclusion. On return to the house of seclusion, she was dressed in new clothing. As she emerged, with head hidden behind a cloth or veil of beads, she was instructed to kneel and bite the ear of a goat brought to lie in front of the doorway. Though no one explained this to her, nor have I been able to get an explication, biting (*ku-luma*) is an element in other rituals, as is the replacement of clothing. The latter occurred when one shifted to a new status. After this, came *cilebe*, the slaughtering of stock. The father provided the first animal; her lineage the second. *Chilebe* entitled the provider to claim stock from the girl's bridewealth, and associated her with both lineages from which she sprang. The meat was used to feed the gathering.

During the public feasting and dancing that followed, the girl sat quietly, face obscured. On the Plateau in the 1940s, this was the time when the assembly was called upon to present her with money with which she later bought clothing. The collection was said to be a new custom, started late in the 1930s, but by the mid 1940s it was an important aspect of the puberty ceremony in most neighbourhoods, with a "master of ceremonies" appointed for his ability to amuse the crowd and encourage the girl's kin and neighbours to rivalry and generosity. It spread to Gwembe hill villages in the 1950s. Giving followed the ritual order, in that the first contributor was the father or his representative, then the mother or someone of her lineage, and only after this was it open for anyone to come forward.

While people were still celebrating, the girl herself was escorted to pay a formal visit to some chosen kin. If seclusion had been in the house of her father or a member of his lineage, she visited lineage kin; if secluded by her own lineage, then the visit was to her father's kin. In the days when childhood betrothal was the rule, her betrothed took

part in the public celebration ending seclusion, and marriage usually followed immediately after this visit ended.

Seclusion and the celebration of emergence were still practiced on the Plateau and in the Gwembe hills at the beginning of the twenty-first century, although I do not know how much of the old procedures and teachings are included. In some instances, seclusion is shortened to a day or two, and parents of school girls may arrange for her seclusion to take place during school holidays. In 2001 I was told that some Plateau girls still stayed in seclusion for a number of months, and that as in earlier years they were rubbed with red ochre and instructed in the evenings.

People of the Zambezi Plain in Gwembe Central and Gwembe South denied that they had either secluded their daughters or given other overt recognition to the coming of puberty. Prior to 1951 girls were betrothed as infants or small children and sent to their husbands when their breasts formed. By then bridewealth obligations should have been met. It was the wedding itself that advanced her to a new status.

Marriage Rituals

Marriage rituals were once elaborate, celebrating the gradual detachment of a woman from her own home and her incorporation into the household she was to create with her husband (Colson 1958:336ff). Infant betrothal was once the rule in Gwembe, but not on the Plateau where betrothal usually took place when the girl was close to puberty (Davidson 1915: 407), and certainly by the 1940s a matter in which the girl herself had a choice. Plateau women had more autonomy, missions were nearby, and complaint of coercion could be made to district officials. One result was that in the 1940s, many Plateau women had their first child before marriage, since once a woman became pregnant all negotiations over bridewealth had to cease until her child was some months old, because contention was seen as dangerous to the foetus and the newborn. Elaborate wedding ceremonies, such as described by Davidson in the 1910s (1915:407ff) were by then rare, although school people might have Christian weddings.

Child betrothal ended officially in Gwembe in 1951, when the Gwembe Native Authority was induced to ban it. Thereafter, elopement usually initiated Gwembe marriages, although after a few days the

girl returned home until the elopement damages were paid and the terms of bridewealth negotiated. After this she was ceremonially sent to her husband in what was known as *kukwela* ("to draw" "to pull"). The uncertainties of the resettlement period, led to an abandonment of wedding ritual, although by then a few Gwembe marriages were celebrated in Christian churches. Even those who called themselves Christians, however, usually did not initiate their marriage in a wedding. Catholic weddings in Lusitu, in Gwembe North, usually took place only after the couple had lived together for some years and the man had paid damages (*mulandu*) for taking his wife from her parents without permission. After this, local courts held that her kin could no longer demand that the woman leave her husband if they were dissatisfied with his behaviour, and so the marriage was regarded as sufficiently stable for it to be recognized with the sacrament of marriage. Weddings were big occasions, with much feasting and the giving of gifts by members of the church. Seventh Day Adventists and other churches celebrated the marriages of their members with formal speeches and prayers, while the couple sat heads downcast facing the congregation. The giving of gifts followed the old ritual order, with the father giving first, then the mother or other lineage member, and then other kin. But in Christian weddings, the *mizimo* have no place.

Tonga marriage rituals involved the *mizimo* at three crucial moments. The first came when the bride was sent to her husband, at which time her father or his representative poured an offering at the doorway through which she was being taken, to inform the *mizimo* guarding the house that she was no longer a member of that household. The second came some years later, when bridewealth payments were completed. Then firestones (*masua*) were installed beside her house by two women, representing her own lineage and her father's lineage. Thereafter, she had the right to cook independently. Until then she was attached to another household and cooked together with the senior woman who might be her mother-in-law or her husband's senior wife. In Gwembe Valley placement of the firestones also gave the woman the right to make beer, but on the Plateau that was given only sometime later in the ritual of *ku-zibwa*, "to be made known", and only then did the couple become full ritual adults. The first beer was for the husband's ancestors, and he then for the first time poured an offering at the doorway

of their house and called upon the *muzimo* of one of his kin to become guardian of the house. Cooking and brewing made explicit the emergent economic independence of the new household, for the firestones were given only after the couple had produced a crop in their own field using seed given them by their kin. Only when they had harvested a crop from their field did they have their own granary to hold the grain which would sustain themselves and allow them to brew the beer needed to honor the *mizimo*. It was also then that for the first time they hosted others in the community who came to share the beer. Thereafter, each spouse was expected to make an annual offering to ensure the continued interest of the *mizimo* associated with them: other offerings were made when divinations found that this or that *muzimo* was demanding beer.

The involvement of the *mizimo* signalled the importance of marriage. That it meant more than a transitory sexual union was also signalled by the way in which it structured the behavior of husband and wife. Each had to avoid certain affines: a man should not look at or speak to his mother-in-law until after he had given her grandchildren and even then had to treat her with reserve. He could not address his father-in-law directly until he had paid his bridewealth. A woman had to avoid her father-in-law, until she had a son who could be called by his name.

The union of husband and wife was initiated through a sequence of small ceremonies through which the bride was introduced to and became accustomed to her new home. Initially she was seized and pulled from her home by messengers sent by her husband, and then, with attending friends, she was escorted to her new home by sisters and other female kin of her husband. Beads placed on the path enticed the party forward, and finally over the doorsill of the house built for the bride by her husband and his friends. In the first days of marriage, her husband provided her with a spear and a stool, the stool of *bwiinga* (the term for the bridal period). He also named her for a close male friend: it was by this name that he would speak of her and address her until the birth of her first child entitled her to be known as its mother. Within a few days she visited her old home, taking food that she had prepared, and returned with cooking pot and basket. Her husband either divided his existing field with her, or he cleared a new field for

her. One of her parents might also give her a field at this time. Both sets of parents were expected to provide the couple with initial seed, so that the food on which the new household depended also descended from both lines. By the time their first crop ripened, the woman should be pregnant or have borne her first child. If she were slow to conceive, the couple consulted diviners, who might find a *muzimo* withholding fertility because it was angered by some default. On the Plateau in the 1940s, the *muzimo* implicated was often one whose name the woman bore, and it was said to feel angry at the lack of honour shown to it by the husband through his slowness in paying the final installments of bridewealth. In Gwembe, the angry *muzimo* was more likely to be that of a father or a lineage male said to resent the husband's lateness in paying to its inheritor its due share of bridewealth. For though dead, *mizimo* demand their due which they enjoy vicariously through their inheritors.

Ritualization of Crafts

In the past all steps that initiated productive activity were marked by ritual: clearing of fields, sowing of crops, weeding, bird scaring, first fruits, harvest, the making of beer from the new crop, cutting thatching grass, making of pottery or baskets, the making of fish traps or pitfalls and other game traps, smithing, the felling of trees for drums and canoes and at various stages of their construction, fish drives, game drives and hunting of big game.

Much of this ritual vanished as people came to depend on shops for most of the articles they use, big game disappeared, and new methods of fishing were introduced. In the late 1970s, when the Zambian economy worsened and imported goods were in very short supply, there was a revival of old crafts, also fostered by the growth of an international market for African crafts. By the early 1990s, Tonga baskets were being sold in shops in the United States and basket making had become commercialized with a lively local trade in needed materials, while Gwembe stools, drums, and knives were sold in Zambian craft outlets. The revival has not been associated with a revival of the rituals which once recognized the vital importance of the crafts, nor do those who now make drums, stools, pots and baskets for the international market usually think that they have been empowered by a *muzimo*.

The ritual associated with canoe making illustrates something of the rich texture of rural life in the days when people recognized the necessity of meeting their needs locally and relied on ritual to reassure them that the necessary skills were available. The canoe maker, like other specialists, worked at the insistence of a *muzimo*. In Gwembe South, but not elsewhere as far as I know, a canoe specialist after locating a suitable tree, approached the *sikatongo* for permission to fell it. He took with him a goat to be slaughtered for a communal meal eaten by elders of the neighbourhood. In this context the goat was referred to as *mianda* (roots), an obvious metaphor. On the day when the first cut in the tree was to be made, the *sikatongo* made an offering with water in his own house to the *muzimo* of the first settler, asking that the tree not break when it struck the ground.

In other respects canoe makers throughout Gwembe followed much the same regime. On the night before he began work, the canoe maker did not sleep with his wife. In the morning he made an offering with water at his own doorway and called upon the *muzimo* that gave him skill. He then went to the tree, taking with him a hen's egg. This he threw at the trunk. If he missed, he knew that the *basangu* refused to let him take the tree. If he hit the tree, he had permission and began to cut. Note that in this context, people spoke of *basangu* rather than *mizimo*, emphasising that the tree belonged to the bush and so to forces outside the human community. The action was called *kutondezya* ('to point out' 'to show') and was done to alert the *basangu* to what was intended and ask help in the work. But there may be a deeper meaning here, for during a funeral an egg is broken on the path at the stage when the spirit is being cut off from its human existence. Although people deny that trees are thought of as possessing *muya*, here the life of the tree as a tree is being ended.

After the first cut, the specialist called again upon his guiding *muzimu*, using as before an offering of water. Then he called other men to help him fell the tree. During the many days needed to hollow out the trunk, he made other offerings with water, pouring the water over the hull. When the canoe was ready for launching, he had beer made for his directing *muzimo* by one of his wives, and then summoned a woman of his lineage to assist in the offering. With true pragmatism, the remainder of the beer went to reward the work party that carried the canoe to the launching place.

All specialized craft activities, along with hunting, were marked off from daily life by a ban on sexual intercourse on the previous night, and often for as long as the activity continued. This differentiated them from the subsistence activities of agriculture in which everyone was engaged. Here initiation of a new phase of activity required sexual activity, initially by the *sikatongo* and his ritual wife, and then by the couples who planted, weeded, and harvested in their turn. Rituals associated with crafts, including hunting specializations, also differed from agricultural rituals in that a specialist decided on his own when to act, or was moved to act by the *muzimo*, rather than coordinating with others in the community. They also differed in that when offerings were made to the *mizimo* to initiate an activity or on its completion, the specialist offered together with someone of his or her own lineage, whereas the rituals of the agriculture year involved the working together of a husband and wife and emphasized the vital importance of the marital household. Finally, the rituals of craftsmanship incorporated a limited number of symbols and lacked the densely woven set of associations which came together in rituals of the annual cycle and the rituals surrounding death and the reaffirmation of life.

Death and its Meaning

The rituals of death brought together and illuminated much of what was considered to be of vital importance in Tonga life. And every Tonga, except young children, participate in such rituals many times over the course of a single year, playing different roles but always reminded of their own occasions of mourning. While waiting for death and during the funeral itself, women sing dirges they have composed in which they speak again and again of the sorrow they felt when one of their own died. In each death they mourn all deaths.

Mourning is compulsory for those within the neighbourhood and for kin in the immediate vicinity, and today as motor transportation has become more available it involves an ever widening circle of friends, acquaintances, business associates and fellow workers, and the friends of friends who travel between cities, or from town to country, or country to town to take part in the mourning, often summoned by a radio announcement. Despite weekly church services and midweek prayer meetings and other special occasions, death rituals today

dominate ritual experience, and with the advance of AIDS the funeral has become the primary social occasion on which people gather.

Death has always been something that people had to cope with many times throughout the year. This was less true of small dispersed communities in the hills and on the Plateau than in the densely populated Zambezi Plain. There, funeral seemed to follow funeral in the 1950s when the mortality rate was high, especially among infants and small children, even though by then smallpox no longer was a menace as it had been until the end of the 1940s. Mortality rates declined during the late 1960s and early 1970s when the Zambian economy supported the spread of health centres, then well supplied with medication, and small children were regularly immunized against measles, whooping cough, and other illnesses which had once taken a heavy toll every few years. Malaria and tuberculosis were also better controlled. In the 1990s death rates rose again, partly due to the decline in health services, but also due to the spread of HIV, resulting in an increasing number of AIDS deaths after the early 1980s (Clark et al. 1995; Colson 2004c). Increasingly people have become preoccupied with death and the threat of death.

This was not true prior to the spread of HIV. In their prayers Tonga asked for life, for relief from illness and hunger, for good harvests and the fertility of humans and their stock. Death, except of the very old, was usually attributed to witchcraft working in conjunction with the withdrawal of the protection of the *mizimo*, and as *mizimo* become less regarded, witchcraft becomes ever more to the fore. Yet death was also seen as a release from suffering, including the miseries of extreme old age, when the *muzimo* of the mother or grandmother took pity on a sufferer and came with a baby's carrying cloth (*ingubo*) to carry away the *muuya*. Death therefore should be accepted without anger. Those who depart in anger, blaming their kin for killing them with witchcraft and the *mizimo* for failure to protect them, become dangerous forces which return to kill indiscriminately.

People talk little about what life is like for the dead, but in some respects that life is like the life of the shades in ancient Greek thought. Mission teaching on hell, purgatory and heaven so far seem to have been ineffective in changing how many rural people think, though some today say that the *muuya* goes to the sky (*kujulu*), and many

want to know if airplanes reach the sky. Others say that it is transformed into the *muzimo* as the funeral moves to its appropriate end with the reattachment of the spirit to a human intermediary, who, at least in the Zambezi Plain, also inherits the social roles created by the one now dead. Many say they are puzzled by all this and perhaps the living person also has some essential force other than the *muuya*. In the past, life after death was seen as shorn of most human joys, dependent upon uncertain human memory for occasional hospitality, stopped from further development save in terms of power acquired over those still living, and due for a final decline as death removes one by one those for whom the dead might have affection and who retain some memory of it's human life. Then it becomes a malevolent force.

It is little wonder that Tonga spent little time contemplating life after death and preferred to concentrate upon the continuing relationships between the living and the spirits of the dead. It was the continuity of life from generation to generation that was of primary importance. The funeral ended with a reaffirmation that life would continue through new birth. The continuity that was being affirmed was that of the lineage and the generations that descend from it. The individual as individual would not return save as pure spirit. The body merged into clay (*bulongo*) from which some say it was made; the shadow (*cinzimweemwe*) went into the grave with the body, the *muuya* remained and was transformed.

CHAPTER VIII

DEATH AND ITS RITUALS

Death and the Human Condition

Funeral rituals once encoded much of Tonga thought about the human condition (Moonga et al. 1996). They probably still do for many. The basic theme is a summing up of human life, and the variations from one area to another do not obscure this fundamental message. The rituals celebrate the status achieved and the various sets of relationships created over a lifetime by the deceased, the importance of kinship in general and the continuity of the lineage, and the value of neighbourliness. One evidence of the importance given to funeral ritual is found in the old belief that the *muuya* of animals that mourn their dead give rise to *mizimo* (Chapter Five), just as human mourning in the funeral is part of the process by which human *muuya* is transformed into the *muzimo*. Funerals are also large-scale gatherings lasting a number of days with rituals orchestrated to celebrate a resurgence of life in the community at large after death has taken one of its members.

All members of the community ought to be mourned. This excluded children diagnosed as anomalous at birth and those who cut the upper teeth first, who were defined as creatures of the bush and returned to the bush. In being disposed of without mourning, such children were treated like lepers, who became outcasts during life, and suicides who chose to die of themselves. By the mid-1950s, Gwembe lepers and suicides were mourned, but I know of a Plateau leper whose death was unmourned in 1951. No one wailed. Clan joking partners (*bajwanyina*) disposed of his body and his personal belongings in an antbear burrow. A single cow was slaughtered to feed those who disposed of the body. There was no death divination, and the *muzimo* was not inherited (Diary of Benjamin Shipopa, 1951). All this is in stark contrast with what happens when someone accepted as a member of the community dies. Then burial takes place within the homestead or, since the 1950s, perhaps in a cemetery. There is public mourning, and the continued existence of the dead in the form of a *muzimo* is celebrated.

Suicides in the 1940s and 1950s commonly chose to hang themselves, which meant they had a good chance of being found and revived. Since the 1970s, drinking one of the easily available pesticides is the more usual method, though some still survive the attempt. A survivor was regarded as dangerous until ritually treated, with clan joking-relatives making rude fun of the attempt, and reintegrated into the community

through a communal meal. The rope used was burned, for otherwise it might kill another. The house where the attempt was made was abandoned: no one should ever sleep there again. But the subsequent death of one who had survived and been treated was mourned like any other death.

On the Plateau, from at least 1946, and in Gwembe from at least 1956, infants are mourned with the exception of stillbirths and those who die immediately after birth. In 1948, I heard a Plateau woman insist that she would mourn her dead child, "My child was a person". She got her way, although others had said the baby was too young to mourn. In 1996, I was told at Siameja in Gwembe South that they mourn a child who dies after having been brought out from the birth house, usually at the end of its first week. This is the time when children are given ancestral names. Even so, the funeral of a child who dies before cutting its first tooth is usually completed on the day of death, and should be an affair of *bacembele* (old women) only. They dig the grave and carry out the burial, tasks given to men when older children and adults die. They are given cooked grain to eat, rather than the meat provided at the funeral of an older person. This, however, may be changing, with children mourned by the wider community from an early age. This may reflect the drop in child mortality. More children survive and the death of an infant becomes less accepted. At Siameja in 1998, I found both men and women mourning at the funeral of a child of a few weeks, and the funeral ran its full course. The death of a child, even when only the old women officiate, requires purification, carried out through the ritual intercourse of the parents, to free parents and homestead of death pollution.

Once a child is formally named, it is accepted as having a life force recognized both by its lineage and the lineage of its father. On death that life force has to be dealt with, but since few have been involved with it until it becomes free to run around, its death involves a minimum of attention. A woman's first child should be buried at the homestead from which its mother came and where it should be born. Those dying later are buried at the homestead of their parents. A child dying after cutting its first teeth should be wailed for because "it is a big person". The purification from death is carried out by the parents. If the father is absent or the mother has recently given birth to another child and

should abstain from intercourse, the last stage of the funeral must be postponed until they are able to come together. Until then the mother at least remains under death pollution. If the parents are unavailable, a woman of the mother's lineage acts with her husband and receives the *muzimo* of the dead child so that it remains within the lineage. Only after intercourse, which demonstrates the continuity of life, can the child's spirit be informed that it should return to its mother to be reborn as another child with a better chance for life. The mother or surrogate mother is anointed on the navel rather than on the throat, the place of anointment when the *muzimo* of an adult is inherited. The next child born may receive the same name. Some say it is the spirit of the dead child now inhabiting a new body.

This looks very like reincarnation despite Tonga denials that this takes place, but here there is nothing to reincarnate, except the life force itself; for the child has yet to establish a social existence apart from its immediate family. The man or woman who has built a separate social personality cannot return in the same fashion. They now have an independent identity and their *mizimo* stand for unique persons, witness what is said of the differentiation of twins.

A boy or girl nearing puberty is already of some significance outside the household. Moreover, by this age children are expected to survive, and their deaths excite strong emotion. Mourners both grieve and are angry that death has deprived them of a person. Their funerals are much like those of full adults, except that parents are again expected to perform the purification and the *muzimo* is inherited, although people of different regions have different preferred inheritors. In Gwembe South, where each lineage has four inheritors, the *muzimo* is given to the inheritor of the appropriate sex and generation. In this the child is treated as an adult. Elsewhere, the *muzimo* is usually given to a younger sibling who is anointed at the throat. Such an inheritor has few responsibilities. The dead has left no children on whose behalf offerings must be made, and the inheritor probably will never be called upon to make an offering in its name. Diviners are most unlikely to implicate such a *muzimo* in any troubles arising within the lineage. If invoked, it is as one of the throng of lineage dead whom those summoned by name are asked to bring with them.

Those who die after marriage are already the nexus of multiple new relationships which have to be dealt with during the course of the funeral. The *muzimo* is now seen as operating within the orbit of a household that the dead helped to create and as having rights over the children he or she produced. It has rights and asserts them. Immediately after death it is also dangerous to those who have shared its living space. Portions of the funeral ritual are phrased to divorce the new spirit from the domestic realm it knew in life. It has to be taught that it is no longer a living member of that community.

Immediately after burial it stays close to the grave site, once always dug in the dooryard. Thereafter it may begin to wander off into the bush. During this stage it may be referred to as a *zibandwa* (from *kabandwa*, grave) or *zimpuka* (pest, dangerous animal, ghost). Until the final ritual which provides it with an inheritor and a new household placement, it is most vulnerable and most dangerous. Vulnerable, in that it may be captured by a witch who will then use it as a ghost (*celo*) helper. It is also vulnerable because other *mizimo*, even of its lineage, will not welcome its presence until it has been purified from death:

They tell it to stay away because it stinks of death;

They tell them to stay with their own kind of *zimpuka*. When beer is poured, other *mizimo* drive them away and say they have no right to come to share in the beer because no beer has been made for them (and therefore they cannot reciprocate).

It is dangerous because it may resent its death, or because it has not yet learned it's new role and tries to approach old associates on the old terms, not realizing that death has made it into something both more and less powerful than the living.

In recent years, however, funerals frequently do not proceed with burial following immediately after death through to the final stages in an orderly progression ending with the recognition of the new *muzimo*. Burial may take place, but the rest of the funeral be postponed until people find it convenient to gather. This is usually after harvest. Or there may be other reasons for postponement. Meantime the spirit exists and may be angry. Some think it then roams in the bush. Others

say it may be in the house where death took place, which should be closed until the funeral takes place. Wherever it is, it may be angry and dangerous.

Diary, Chifumpu Village, Gwembe Central, July 1995

JSS became seriously ill at his homestead in Madonda... This was because they had brought him to his homestead so that he could select items he could use temporarily until the funeral of his wife takes place in August. The relatives of the dead wanted to close the house so that no one could enter it saying that the spirit of the dead should be closed there until the start of the funeral. JSS wanted to remove some things before they closed the house and all its contents. Under Tonga custom no one is allowed to enter or to open the door. After he had picked up a pot and as he bent the second time, his back-bone felt as if it was broken. His body was as though it had been shocked by electricity and he was filled with cold. His relatives said that it was the spirit of his wife that was making him ill. They wanted to burn some herbs so that if it was a ghost it would run away to its living relatives and trouble them if it had evil intentions. When they saw this the woman's relatives were angry and told JSS's relatives not to burn the herbs in the house where the woman's spirit should be enclosed to stay until the funeral. They said JSS should be treated in the bush rather than in the house. After that one of his relatives took JSS to his home in Sinafala.

(Shadreck Siajebo)

Formerly, life should end within the homestead through which one had built up one's primary social personality, and within one's house. This was called *lufu lwanganda* ("death within the house") and contrasted with *lufu pansaili* ("death on the ground" or "death outside") which was considered dangerous. Membership in the territorial community of the *cisi* once depended on the existence of a dwelling and the working of a field, as witness the old rule that one had the right to die and be buried in a neighbourhood only if one had resided, planted, and harvested there. Death elsewhere was an offense to the host community, which feared the presence of an alien spirit and demanded indemnity and

purification by the lineage of the dead. The payment and ritual of purification were known as *ingolomokwa*, except in Gwembe South where it was referred to as *cipobwedwa*. (Elsewhere, the latter term is used for any common meal that marks the reintegration of someone who has been severed for a time from the domestic group, whether this be by elopement, captivity (including prison), army service, labour migration, or overseas study.) The ritual involves the slaughter of a goat or ox at the grave site while the spirit is informed that it must accompany its kin back to its own home and leave the neighbourhood of death in peace. A 1951 Plateau divination attributed drought to failure to carry out *ingolomokwa*. I last heard of it being performed in 1996, when a Bemba fisherman drowned in Kariba Lake in Gwembe Central. His fellow Bemba fishermen were asked to provide the cow whose slaughter purified the neighbourhood where his body washed ashore.

Those who fall ill, at a field shelter or on a journey, or are dying in hospital are carried home to die, if possible. This is sometimes said to be for the convenience of those who must gather to mourn, but it is also appropriate that the clay (*bulongo*) of the body be mingled with the clay of the homestead. If a man has several wives, he should die in the house of the wife whom he first married, for she is the one “who washed from him the dirt of boyhood”. Her house is also the one associated with the *muzimo* of his father and so, in a sense, represents the house of his birth. A woman should die in her own house, where she has borne children who will continue her lineage.

Increasingly, however, people are dying away from home. If death takes place in town or in a hospital or health centre, no *ingolomokwa* is necessary although it is still common for kin to kill an animal if death takes place in a strange village. But given the new ease of transport, burial if possible takes place in the home village. Cliggett, for instance, reports that in 1993-1994, bodies of all three adults who died away from home were brought back to the village where she lived, and she found people willing to go to enormous expense to arrange this (Cliggett 1997:122). If return is impossible, usually because money is lacking, burial and a brief mourning take place at the place of death. Afterwards items of clothing are carried back to the village for burial at the homestead, or a grave site is demarcated about which the usual rituals are enacted. If the dead man or woman had no village residence,

the clothes are brought to the homestead of a kinsman or kinswoman. After this mourning takes place and the *muzimo* is inherited.

Colson field notes, July 29, 1996, Siameja

I accompanied Siang'omba to a funeral for Samuel's sister who is buried at Choma. A place had been designated as a grave and on it were placed a pot of beer and a tin of water with an enamel cup. People went up one by one, men and women, clan by clan – husband's clan, father's clan, own clan, another affinal clan. Each dipped cup into pot of beer and poured content over the grave, then same with water. Nothing said, but women were singing dirges about the grave.

In 1998, a dying man, long settled in Zimbabwe, instructed his children to take earth from his grave for burial at Musulumba beside the grave of his older brother, even though he himself had left the village before it was resettled in Gwembe North in 1958. Earth was taken and after burial beside the grave in the brother's abandoned homestead site, he was mourned and his *muzimo* was inherited by Musulumba kin.

An exception to the rule that one should die where one lives is made for a woman who goes to her mother's house for childbirth, as most young women once did, especially for a first birth. Now many prefer to give birth at a local health centre, attended by a trained midwife. If the woman or child dies when she is at her mother's place, burial and then several days of mourning take place there. Then, if bridewealth has been given for her, the funeral is taken for completion to the homestead of her marriage, but there is no talk of *ingolomokwa*.

Those dying on a distant journey, who have not been mourned appropriately, become malevolent spirits, because they are angry with their kin who have not introduced them to the community of *mizimo*. Divinations frequently name the *mizimo* of those so dying as trouble-makers, although this ignores the dogma that the *muzimo* becomes such through the funeral rituals. The remedy is to summon people for a funeral, which is carried out as though death has just occurred. A grave (*cigombwa* or *cibandwa*) is created by marking a site with a twig or stone, and the funeral proceeds as from the moment when earth is smoothed over the grave. It terminates with the inheritance of the

spirit who is to become a protecting *muzimo* and no longer act as a vengeful *zibandwa*.

With death, the human pattern, *buntu*, is completed. Through the passage of a lifetime men and women become fully formed. Death is both the final major event of life and a transformation. The *muuya* of the person is no longer joined with a substantive body. The emergent *muzimo* is not the same as the living person, though it zealously enforces all rights pertaining to that person. A few elders are said to give instructions to have a medicine placed in the grave, together with a hollow reed inserted to lead from the ear of the corpse to the surface of the ground. As the body decays, a grub should emerge through the reed and be metamorphosed into a snake or lion. In this form some element of the dead can continue to operate, even though the *muzimo* also exists in non-material form. For the majority of men and women, the decay of the physical body releases the *muuya* to wander the bush and village in nonmaterial form without the power of further development. A *muzimo* does not build new homesteads, create new children, or acquire new possessions. All this it can now do only vicariously through descendants and lineage kin.

The Moment of Death: The Outmoded Body

A funeral is a time of great emotion. It is called *idilwe*, from the verb *ku-lila*, "to weep" or "to mourn", and it is a time of tears and wailing. Durkheim is only partially right when he wrote, "Mourning is not a natural movement of private feelings wounded by a cruel loss; it is a duty imposed by the group.... It is a ritual attitude which he is forced to adopt out of respect for custom, but which is, in a large measure, independent of his affective state (1965:443)." A funeral reactivates grief felt for other deaths. It rouses fears associated with one's own mortality and the mortality of those one loves. Among the Tonga it also brings together in one place those who suspect, fear and hate each other, while those who mourn also sense the presence of the many spirits of the dead who are drawn to a place of death.

The "ritual attitude" is a mask for this complex of emotions. The mask begins to be assumed even before death takes place, as kin and neighbours gather and women begin their dirges. The wailing, of course, is ritualized wailing. Those who give way to emotion and

begin to weep or scream in direct expression of what they feel are jerked back into the ritual cadences. Others can bear their grief only if it takes formulaic form. But they know the emotion is there, as the following excerpt from my 1957 field notes shows:

Madonda Village, Gwembe Central

MS, a senior woman, is dying, watched by her two daughters. One of her sons enters and stands looking at his mother with tear wet eyes. He begins to speak, "All right then, die! You will die but I am not happy about your death. If I find out who has bewitched you and sent you to your death, I will kill him if he comes near me. Why have they wanted to hurt you and taken you from us? I shall do what I shall do to the one who has killed you." He continued in this strain for some time although one of his sisters tried to stop him. His mother's brother's son, slightly older than he, is sitting outside with other men waiting for the death. He rises and enters the house to tell him not to talk like this. His sister comes out and says, "What use is such talk? If you did anything, it would only mean that you would go to prison. What use is it to think of who is killing her? We shall just mourn properly when she dies." When the son emerges, still speaking angrily, various men tell him to forget it, that he is not the only one to lose a mother, that he must have seen that others have lost their mothers and the thing to do is to mourn in the proper fashion. ...After her death and burial, a schoolboy son arrives from the mission where he is in school. He stands by the grave bawling, "Mother! Mother!" A woman tries to lead him away but he continues as before. Finally his paternal half-brother takes him by the shoulder and leads him away. The men and women sitting nearby were embarrassed by his behavior and puzzled about how to deal with him.

The pulse is regarded as the indication that life still persists, but this is an ambiguous signal. On various occasions attendants watching at a deathbed have commented, "This is really death (*lufu*). Only the heart remains." At the moment of death, the intermittent wailing crescendos, and the women sitting around the body rise to dance as their rattles

increase the tempo. The house is a turmoil of motion, but this does not last long. Burial commonly takes place almost immediately after death, although in recent years it has been increasingly delayed to permit people to come to view the body. If men are available to dig the grave, one dying at night may be buried before morning light. Those in attendance at the moment of death should include lineage members, members of the father's lineage, spouses, and older children. But it is affines and joking relatives who should dig the grave.

Although no Tonga has pointed to the parallels, in many respects death is treated as a reversal of birth and entry into the community. The mother is said to be the sack or container which moulds blood, supplied by the father, into the child. After the child is born, its father should provide the carrying cloth or skin in which the child spends much of its time before it can run around. If the mother has given birth in the home of her own kin, then it is the child's father's sister who should come with the cloth in which the child will be carried back to the house of its parents. But on death, it is the *muzimo* of a former woman of the lineage, usually a grandmother, who comes with a carrying cloth to bear away the *muuya* of the dying person.

This leaves the body which must still be cared for. It is for the father, or his representative, to give instructions that the time has come to wash the body and wrap it for burial, although affines perform the task, and it is the father who instructs that the grave be dug. The affines dress the body, tie the limbs, and wrap it in cloth. In the past, it was bound into the fetal position, but is now merely wrapped and tied tightly or, if possible, placed in a coffin. The fetal position may be implicated in the equation of death with birth, but informants said that it was used because of the difficulty of digging an extended trench when they had only digging sticks, and that they adopted extended burials when iron hoes became easily available. When a hoe is used, a trench fits the swing of the shoulders better than digging a cylindrical opening. The body is still usually bound about with cloth to prevent the limbs from flopping during removal to the grave. Some find this repugnant and dislike the thought of having their own bodies so bound, and also want a coffin to protect their bodies from the earth. Village carpenters now produce coffins, and coffin-makers in the towns have steady employment as AIDS deaths mount.

According to Weinrich, the Gwembe Tonga of Zimbabwe shave the head of the corpse, again reminiscent of the shaving of the head of the newborn and she suggests that this is a symbolic equation of death with birth (1977:71). I do not know if the head is shaved elsewhere in Tonga country. When I have been present at the preparation of a body, attendants dipped their hands in water before stroking the body, especially the face again and again. They make sure the eyes are closed. Sometimes the body is anointed with red ochre, which symbolizes life and fertility in other contexts. L. Brown (personal communication) reports that, on the Plateau in the 1960s, the body of a married man or woman was stretched out on a blanket, and the surviving spouse was brought to lie down, back to back and embracing the corpse by extending arms backward, in a position that is the reversal of the position they took when they had lain together on their bed. I have not seen this.

Burial

It is for the father, or the father's representative, to choose the grave site and give instructions for the digging of the grave. In the 1850s and early 1860s the Livingstones found what they called permanent graveyards among southern Tonga or Batoka: "they reverence the tombs of their ancestors, and plant the largest elephants' tusks, as monuments at the head of the grave, or entirely enclose it with the choicest ivory (1865:231)." These tombs may have been *malende* sites. In the twentieth century colonial officials tried to persuade people to establish village cemeteries, but most graves continued to be located in the dooryard. In Gwembe South, on the Zambezi Plain, grave sites in the 1950s were marked with stakes, pots, and sometimes metal boxes, and a number of graves might be located close together at what had been a former homestead site. Elsewhere earth was mounded over the grave and then beaten flat by the dancing feet of mourners. Thereafter nothing indicated the site. It is only in the 1990s that I found Gwembe Central people marking graves, sometimes by cementing the grave surface. On the Plateau, cement grave markers began to be used by the early 1950s and are now common.

The spot chosen for the grave is first marked by the pouring of water from a gourd ladle (*lufulo*) which is then broken while *mizimo* hovering near are admonished, "Take this person. Do not return to

take another". On the Plateau, the gourd is broken by a representative of the father. In Gwembe Central, it is broken by a member of the lineage. In Gwembe South, it is the senior inheritor of the linked lineage (*basilufulo*). Then the length of the grave is laid out, using a reed matched against the body. Male affines or non-kin, including clan joking-partners, begin to dig. When all is ready, the "father" gives the order to bring out the body. The bearers of an adult are always men. They should include lineage members, members of the father's lineage, and their affines. The body is brought head first from the dwelling, just as a child should emerge head first from the womb. The spouse and any small children stand back, because they should not watch this last exit from the house. At the grave the body is lowered into the arms of waiting men, who have jumped into the grave to receive it.

On the Plateau all were buried with head to west and feet to east, the reverse of the position taken in sleep. In Gwembe Central all were buried with head to east and feet to west, on the grounds that the Tonga had moved from east of the Zambezi and their route of travel was westwards. In Gwembe South, men were buried with head to east and feet to west: women were buried in the reverse position. People disagreed on why this was so. Some said that men look to the east to see the time to begin work, while women look to the west to learn if it is time to start stamping meal. Others said that women rise first and look to the west, while men look to the west to see when it is time to stop work. Some simply said they did not know – if there ever had been a reason, they had not been told.

However the body is oriented, certain personal possessions are placed close beside the head: a water pot with water "to prevent the spirit from taking the rain", a drinking gourd or cup, pipe, tobacco or cannabis, medicine containers with their contents, wooden or metal dishes and perhaps clothing, and the woman's marriage pot if she had one. Then before the grave is filled, the finality of death is emphasized. When a small child is buried, the mother is brought to the foot of the grave, and instructed to sit with legs stretched out on either side of the tiny trench. Nothing is said, but inevitably she is reminded of the child's birth. As it once departed from her body, it now departs from her care. When a married woman dies, her husband is brought to lie down on the north side of the grave for a moment "to lie with her for

the last time". If the husband dies, it is the senior wife who performs the act, but she lies to the south of the grave. Then filling the grave begins. The first earth is pushed in by mother and father together, their inheritors acting in their stead if they are dead. They stand with their backs to the grave and push the earth backward into the cavity. A widow or widower next kneels with back to grave, and with the buttocks pushes into the grave one of the three hearth supports (*masua*) whose installation symbolized public acknowledgement of the creation of their household. After this the grave diggers start the fill while women bring water pots to be broken into shards. These are added to the fill, with the exception of one large shard reserved for the ritual washing that completes the burial. Cooking pots may not be used, perhaps because fire is equated with heat and life but also with anger. There is also the implicit contrast of fire with rain. From time to time as earth and sherds mount, men drop into the grave and ram the loose earth into place using stout poles. In Gwembe Central and on the Plateau the final fill is beaten to make a flat surface, immediately pounded even flatter as mourners begin the dance over the grave. In Gwembe South, the earth is slightly mounded and the grave marked with a walking stick or other pole thrust through an inverted pot.

With the burial complete, a spray of *intungulu* (*Kaempferia aethiopica*) is placed with a little water in the potshard saved from the fill. *Intungulu* is used both as a famine food and as a medicine for heart trouble and stomach pain (B. Reynolds 1968:242-243). People have said that it is used at this stage of the burial because the old people told them to do so and offer no further explanation, but it is aromatic and spirits such as ghosts are said not to like such odours. One by one those who have touched the body or the grave come forward to bend down and flick the water with one or two fingers. This purifies them from contact with the body. Male mourners then perform a ceremonial march over or around the grave, flourishing spears and calling out clan praise songs (*kugaula*). They are followed by women singing dirges to accompany their formal funeral dance (*kutatila*) over and around the grave. In Gwembe South, the dance circles the grave and then moves through the homestead, and sometimes through the village. Elsewhere it centers on the grave itself, and people say explicitly that they want the earth stamped home. In mourning an adult, women

dancers carry possessions left by the dead: hoes, axe, spears, guns, tin trunks, dance shields, baskets, pots, fly switches, and they may dress in the clothing of the dead. All of this will be distributed among kin at the end of the funeral with the formal division of the estate.

From Death to Life: Grave and House

During the funeral, house and grave stand in opposition to each other, and the flow of action between them structures the ritual. Life flows first from house to the grave. Then, as the funeral comes to an end, it flows back to the house where a sexual union takes place, a new fire is kindled, the inheritance of the *muzimo* proceeds, and a communion meal is cooked in which descendants of the lineage should participate.

The body is the focus of mourning for only a short period, a matter of several hours usually, ending with the burial. Then, while the body decays in the grave, the mourners turn their attention to creating a new relationship between the survivors and the *muuya*, which must now become *muzimo* and *celo*. It is evident that a primary concern is with how humans will relate to the spirit, for today kin prevented from attending a funeral may hold a substitute funeral to assure the spirit that they too care for it. This is now a common practice in Gwembe Valley. It seems to have been adopted after 1965 when the border between Zambia and Zimbabwe was closed, making it impossible for people to move back and forth to attend funerals and other kinship occasions. Prior to that time it was assumed that distant kin would eventually pay a visit of condolence during which they would provide a fowl or goat for mourning. Now, word of death arrives by post or radio. Those prevented from crossing the border compromise by holding a brief substitute funeral, but one that does not include the crucial features of purification and inheritance of the *muzimo* since these have already been carried out at the true funeral.

House, fire, water, grain, and sexuality are essential elements of funeral ritual just as they are essential elements of Tonga life. After the burial, the household fire is extinguished. Thatch is pulled from the roof, otherwise a taboo act (*malweza*), to use in starting the fire that should burn on the grave until the dead is reestablished as a *muzimo*. Principal mourners smear their bodies with ashes from the fire. The

granary is broken, so that its contents stand revealed, one reason why in the past each spouse had his or her own granary. On the Plateau, when a spouse dies, the marital bed is dismantled: the right hand poles are added to the funeral fire of the husband, the left hand poles to the fire of the wife. Plateau mourners also burn the doorposts of the house, right for husband and left for wife. On the Zambezi Plain, where the house may continue to be used as a dwelling, the doorway is not destroyed. The bed is dismantled and a new bed installed only at the end of the funeral, when the *muzimo* has been summoned back to human society in its new role. In the past, a widow was not supposed to sit on a stool until her husband's funeral had been concluded, but this is now ignored. Many younger people have never heard of the prohibition. But then, new husbands no longer honour a man's obligation to provide his bride at the time of their marriage with a stool of *bwiinga*, which was taboo to most others because it was closely associated with her sexuality. During the initial funeral period, sexuality is muted. While at the funeral, men and women should sleep separately, and kin who sleep elsewhere should not engage in intercourse until the funeral shifts into its final phases. This last is now ignored by many. Funerals are too often postponed for long periods for this to be acceptable, and as some said, with people dying at a distance, you might not hear of the death for some time. Since nothing happened to those who slept together in ignorance of the death, people decided it was pointless to observe such taboos. Most would still agree that the owner of the homestead where the funeral is held, and his wife or wives should not have intercourse until after the final ritual cleansing, but even this is not always followed.

Throughout the early days of the funeral, a widow, forbidden to wash and daubed with earth from the grave, remains within the house or on the verandah. She is cared for by affines and clan joking partners on the Plateau and in Gwembe Central, and by women of the linked lineage in Gwembe South. A surviving husband, who has lost his household with the death of his wife, remains outside, sitting somewhat apart from other men. Women of the lineage of the dead, who serve as principal mourners, spend much of their time about the house or houses.

The Funeral Sequence

As word of the death spreads – the characteristic wailing alerting those within the vicinity – mourners begin to arrive in numbers. With each new arrival, women mourners pour out of the homestead to sweep arriving women into the swirling funeral dance around the grave, while arriving men run in flourishing spears and axes, calling out clan and personal praise slogans as they begin to march back and forth between grave and house. Women mourners may throw themselves upon the ground screaming, “We are lost! He/she has left us. Mother! Father!” Meantime young men, recently married to women of the lineage, are sent off to summon lineage members and other kin who live at a distance. Every adult who lives in the neighbourhood is expected to attend the funeral before it ends. Many set up camp within the homestead, as do those who come from other neighbourhoods. Only close kin must stay continuously at the site. Other mourners, after the first day, may work their fields or busy themselves at other work, but many continue to sleep camped near the grave until the funeral ends in support of their neighbours, and some say to guard the grave against the onslaught of witches in search of human flesh for medicine.

Zambezi Plain residents of Gwembe Central halt a funeral after the first day if the father or the inheritor of his *muzimo* is unable to be present. It resumes only when he comes, for he must approve the choice of an inheritor of the *muzimo* even though the *muzimo* will be given to someone of the lineage of the dead. In the interim a member of the father’s lineage takes charge of all possessions left by the dead. On the Plateau and in Gwembe South, the funeral can proceed as long as any member of the father’s lineage is present, and in an emergency people make do with someone of the father’s clan or substitute a clan joking-partner. If the dead has no known father – as may be true of adults born after the 1950s when men became more likely to deny paternity of children they begot with unmarried girls – the role of “father” is assigned to a son, daughter, or other kin so that the funeral can proceed and inheritance take place.

Affines are responsible for much of the actual work entailed by a funeral. Male affines bring firewood, slaughter stock, boil meat, and cook large pots of porridge, using meal contributed by the mourners. In much of Tonga country they work directly under elders of the lineage of the dead, who are the owners of the funeral (*basidilwe*). Gwembe

South, however, gives supervision of all that pertains to grave and funeral to the *basilufulu* (the chosen inheritors of the linked lineage), who serve as general managers of both funeral and inheritance. They are expected to remember all contributions brought by mourners, though today contributions are usually recorded in a notebook. They decide how provisions shall be allocated and arrange for distribution of cooked food by gender, lineage and territorial groupings.

Who will serve as the primary focus of ritual during the funeral period varies according to the status of the dead. When a child or unmarried boy or girl dies, the rituals of purification and distancing are focused on the parents, and more especially on the mother. During the funeral of a married man or woman, it is the surviving spouse rather than a member of the lineage who is regarded as most in need of protection from the lingering ghost of the dead. In other cases, it is the lineage member who hosts the funeral who becomes its focus.

The first day is the day of grief when thoughts of the dead predominate. On the second day the atmosphere changes, as the emphasis shifts toward renewal of life. On the evening of this day a torch is borne through the village from the house of death. This is *kumunika* ("to shine", "to make a light"). It is said to be for the purpose of warning off *basangu* and because "now the living people must open their eyes. Before all was dark." On the second day there is also a pouring of grain and other seeds over the grave (see also Cliggett 1997:126). These are scrambled for by clan joking partners in most areas, but by grandchildren of the linked lineage in Gwembe South. Informants said the grain is brought "because the dead cannot eat of the grain again. Now it is for others to eat it." Women mourners also dance with stalks of maize or sorghum brought from the field of the dead, but they no longer concentrate their dancing at the grave. They swirl outward into the larger sphere of homestead and cattle kraal and, if the dead belonged to a *katongo* lineage, they may dance to the land shrines associated with the continuity of the neighbourhood community. Cattle owned by the dead may be driven from the kraal to the grave and back again, but to my knowledge this is not done with small stock. On the second day, those attending the funeral may also pursue ordinary everyday crafts. Men make twine or ropes, weave mats, or carve adze and hoe blades. Women weave baskets.

It is also on the second day that dances begin to speak to the continued vitality of the community, for, although *kutatila* continues to be performed, other forms of dancing now take the stage. On the Plateau, these are dances young people use to entertain themselves on moonlight nights. In Gwembe Valley, these compete with *budima*, the dance performed by neighbourhood drum teams (*ngoma*). Every neighbourhood has such a team, whose performances speak to the existence and vitality of the neighbourhood, ready as a community to take on all surrounding neighbourhoods.

The team uses a set of seven drums (*ngoma*) – five pedestal drums of different sizes, known as *budima* drums, plus two drums used for ordinary dancing. In addition, it has one or more sets of one-note antelope horn flutes (*nyele*). The male drummers and flute players are accompanied by a chorus of singing women and girls and by men who run in and out, flourishing their spears in mimic warfare, while all are dressed in beads or other finery. In the past, the bodies and hair of women dancers were bright with red ochre, associated with life and joy and fecundity. The performance of *budima* both licenses young people to organize their own dances, and challenges other neighbourhoods to display their prowess at *budima*. Early in the following morning, before dawn, distant drumming signals their intention to appear. A large funeral may attract four or even five visiting teams, and with their arrival, on the third day, the funeral becomes a theatre of competitive display. By this time, mourning has passed its crisis, and the atmosphere becomes one of vibrant renewed life.

In Gwembe South, the third day is also the day when the surviving spouse (or spouses), is washed at the grave. Formerly the spouse and other principal mourners were then anointed with red ochre. This no longer happens, and even in the 1950s and 1960s only a widow was rubbed down with ochre. Those in other crucial roles – father, father's sister, mother, and mother's brother, and following them other mourners – were marked only with a dot of ochre on face, arm or leg. Elsewhere mourners, including the surviving spouse, take part in *kujata malulwe* ("to seize *malulwe*"), i.e., they flick water from a pot placed on the grave which contains a sprig of *malulwe* (*Cassia abbreviata*). This frees all sleeping at the funeral, other than principal mourners, to sleep with their spouses.

The third day is also the day when mourners go to bathe at a river or pool. As they return, a lineage member in some places or a clan joking partner elsewhere, places a bundle of thatch upon the path and on this an egg. The thatch is lit, and the surviving spouse, or other chief mourner, is told to walk through the smoke while treading on and breaking the egg. Others follow, each one treading upon the charred thatch and the broken egg, while a clan joking partner calls out that they should now cease their wailing. Then the surviving spouse is taken either to the grave or to a termite mound. There, instructed by a clan joking-partner, for the first time since marriage, he or she speaks the real (*muzimo*) name of the dead. The old marital relationship is thus signalled as ended. The smoke from the thatch is said to prevent the spirit from following the spouse or other mourners back to the homestead. The meaning of the egg is not explicated. In Western symbolism there is a relationship between egg and continuing life, e.g., the link between eggs and Easter, but I only assume that this may be what is signalled here. Thatch and egg are still used at this stage of a funeral, at least in Gwembe Central. I saw them on the path taken by returning bathers in 1998.

In the past, it was on the fourth day that a delegation was sent to a diviner to learn the cause of death, though recently delegations may go at the time of burial (Cliggett 1997:123). The delegation should include one or more lineage members and one or more members of the father's lineage. With them, they take the hoe used first in digging the grave. They return to a formal inquest held at the grave site, during which the divination is reported and discussed. The death may be attributed to an angry *muzimo*, witchcraft, retaliation of one's own medicine, or the pity of the *mizimo* for the misery of the extremely old. Today a divination may say that the death is due to AIDS and no other cause. Frequently the divination is disputed by a someone who is sure the death must have some other cause and wants the matter pursued, and sometimes a delegation is sent to consult another diviner.

Only after the inquest is the choice of inheritor announced, if the dead were an adult with spouse and/or children, even though the matter has been canvassed since the first day of mourning and the dead may have named a successor. The choice affects many who do not belong to the lineage and who must be asked to confirm their willingness to

accept the choice. They include the surviving spouse, representatives of the father's lineage and children. But in the last analysis the choice belongs to the lineage, and it is a lineage member who will take the status of the dead. His or her spouse, or spouses, must also be consulted, since their own lives will change as the chosen person assumes new responsibilities.

Then comes the rite of *ku-kukula* (literally, "to sweep"). The "father" and "father's sister" go first to the grave, where a burning log has been placed, and from there to the house – that of the senior wife if there are a number of widows. The "father's sister" opens the door, saying "We bring you to your house". If a man has died, the "father" pulls thatch from the roof, saying "Now this, my son's house, is finished". He will not be the "father" of the successor, unless a full brother of the dead man has been chosen to succeed.

Purification and the Inheritance of the Spirit

At this stage of the funeral, the dead has been excluded as a human personality, and the final phase, associated with the introduction of the new *muzimo*, can take place. For the Tonga, as for many other people in this region of Africa, this is initiated by an act of sexual intercourse through which sexuality and fertility are mobilized against death (Huntington and Metcalf 1979:93). The Tonga call this *kusalasya* ("cleansing" or "purification"), and it should take place within the house associated with the dead. It was once considered necessary both to appease the spirit of the dead and to cleanse survivors of death pollution. While spoken of as a cleansing, implicit in the rite is an affirmation of life, for from the union new life may spring.

For the unmarried, cleansing involves the intercourse of the father and mother, or of a member of the lineage with his or her own spouse. A widow or widower, however, should engage with a lineage mate of the dead, though this may be done symbolically. Among Zambezi residents, this is usually the lineage member chosen to inherit the *muzimo*, but a widow may choose some other member of the lineage as a potential husband who will also purify her. In Gwembe South, with its limited number of inheritors, the man who inherits the widow and is her cleanser is likely to be some other member of the lineage. On the Plateau, where the spirit inheritor is often a child, the cleanser is rarely

the spirit inheritor. When a man leaves several widows, some claim that the inheritor need enter only the house of the senior wife, and that their intercourse purifies all the wives. Others say that each wife should be purified in the order of the marriage. If they have agreed to marry different men, it will be the chosen husband who carries out the ritual whether or not he will inherit the *muzimo*.

A lineage is rarely in the position today of being able to offer a new wife to replace the dead woman, although this was once common. In the 1940s and 1950s, I knew women who had been married as replacements. Cleansing is therefore done through an alternative form of purification, called *kucuuta*. The woman chosen as inheritor, or another woman of the lineage, enters the house together with her own husband. After they have had intercourse, the widower is placed upon their thighs. On the Plateau, where the spirit inheritor was often a small child, *ku-cuuta* was commonly used in the 1940s to purify both men and women, unless the widow agreed to marry a man of her dead husband's lineage.

Widowers have the right to be purified. So do widows, even though they refuse remarriage to a man of the lineage. Once they feared to refuse, dreading the wrath of their dead husband's *muzimo* and the hostility of their affines who might refuse to offer for their children and/or would bewitch them. Increasingly, since the early 1990s, due to fear of HIV infection, only the *ku-cuuta* form of purification is used. In some instances not even this takes place, and some chiefs have banned the sexual purification due to the fear of HIV transmission. Instead the surviving spouse is given money and told to seek purification through medicines supplied by *bang'anga* (diviners, witchfinders, doctors). Many doubt the efficacy of either *ku-cuuta* or a purification with medicines in appeasing the dead. The lineage of the dead, therefore, commonly pays cattle or money to a widow or widower purified by *ku-cuuta*, to be given in turn to a surviving co-wife or new spouse, who risk the anger of the dead by having intercourse with its former partner (Colson 2004c).

In Gwembe Valley, it is after purification that the old bed is destroyed. An affine breaks up its supports and burns these in the bush. If the husband has died, the affine then builds a new bed for the wife, for her household continues in existence. If a woman dies, her

house is converted into a stock pen and is no longer used as a dwelling. In the 1940s, on the Plateau, a house was abandoned after the end of mourning whether husband or wife died. Today, in cities but also increasingly in rural areas, when people have invested in substantial houses, abandonment is unlikely unless it is believed to be haunted. Instead houses become subject to inheritance claims.

The funeral of a married adult moves to its climax through rituals which proclaim the importance of the continuity of the household in which two lineages became united through the marriage of its members, even though today actual replacement of the dead spouse is uncommon. If the widower has not completed bridewealth payments, and usually today this takes place only years after the couple have lived together for some time, his wife's kin may claim that no true marriage existed and refuse to purify him. Worse, on the Plateau and in Gwembe North since the late 1970s, if he has not completed the preliminary payments, they may refuse to allow the burial until he and his kin pay what is demanded. I have not heard of this occurring elsewhere. Those asked about it in Gwembe Central said it would be pointless to try: the husband would get a letter from the chief ordering the burial if anyone tried to halt a burial on these grounds. Refusal to cleanse the husband of death pollution, if bridewealth has not been paid, is common everywhere, at least in Gwembe Valley. The wife's kin may purify themselves, using *ku-chuuta*, but exclude him from the ritual which permits them to return to normal life. While uncleansed, he carries with him death pollution (*caando*) which will attack the first woman with whom he has sexual relations, even if she was a co-wife of the dead woman. In 1987, a diviner found the death of a woman in a village resettled in Gwembe North to be due to *caando* on her husband, who came to her unaware of the death of her co-wife who was in Gwembe Central for treatment. If a man loses a second wife soon after the first, her kin will almost certainly suspect *caando*. They will then refuse to purify him of the death of the second wife. This means he becomes something of an outcast, for women will not accept a man known or suspected to have *caando*. A man left with *caando* in 1957 raped a kinswoman of his dead wife to cleanse himself, and many thought he acted within his rights. The spread of HIV means that fear of *caando* has become more common, as the death of one spouse is likely to follow on the death of the other

and co-wives die in quick succession. At the same time, by attributing illness to *caando*, surviving spouses try to avoid the stigma associated with AIDS, for *caando* can be removed and they have learned that AIDS has no remedy.

After purification is carried out, the inheritance of the *muzimo* takes place early on the following morning. This is known as *kwangwa muzimo*, from *ku-anga*, to tie, and can be translated as “being tied to the *muzimo*”. The chosen inheritor is seated in the doorway and faces inward. A senior lineage member (or member of the linked lineage in Gwembe South) anoints the base of the throat with red ochre and oil, or today only with oil, saying “Sit here, so-and-so. Herd well (*ku-embela*)”, or some comparable invocation. In Gwembe South, beads are also tied on the wrist and if the *muzimo* is ever transferred to another inheritor, the beads are also transferred. After anointment the inheritor stiffens, as he or she is raised and drawn backward through the doorway and turned to face outward. Then relaxed, the inheritor turns again to face the door and reenters the house. In Gwembe Central, when a *muzimo* inheritor dies, the new inheritor may receive both new and old *mizimo*, but frequently at this point there is a redistribution of the *mizimo* of the lineage among a number of possible inheritors. Anointment at the neck takes place as each name is called.

While this goes on, a pot stands beside the doorpost, filled with water in which floats a twig of *musampizya* (*Epaltes alata* (Sond.), Scudder 1962:234). This plant has a pungent odour, and is used as a fumigant against ghosts or to drive away mosquitoes. Those entering or leaving the house use the twig to flick water from the pot upon one leg. This is *ku-jata* (“to grasp”) *musampizya*. This ends the funeral as far as most mourners are concerned. Already many have left and the funeral fires with the exception of the fire at the grave itself have burned themselves out.

There remains the rite of *cilumo* (“the biting” from *ku-luma*, “to bite”) or *ku-jukila* “to cook for”. It takes place after the inheritance of material property has occurred, with the “father” taking a goodly share and various other representative kin receiving tokens. The remainder and the parent’s rights over children and grandchildren belong to the lineage, or did so until the Zambian Parliament in 1989 legislated that substantial portions of any estate was the inheritance

of surviving spouse and children. In Gwembe the bulk of lineage inheritance went to the inheritor of the *muzimo*. *Cilumo* is cooked inside the house of the dead and is the first food cooked there since the death occurred. It too is a sign of the revival of normal life. It may be for this reason that, in Gwembe South, this food is taboo to those who must be continent, including women in late stages of pregnancy, women with a nursing child, their husbands if monogamists, and any couple who have still to make the payment of *ku-taluka*, given to the midwife for permission to resume intercourse after the birth of a child. When the food has been eaten, a branch of *mukalolo* (*Lonchocarpus capassa* Rolfe) is placed on the grave. *Mukalolo* may derive from the word for a woman's breast (*lukolo*), but those asked about this saw no connection. Then a pot is brought, into which grain and water are poured to start the ferment for beer. The "father" washes his hands in the pot calling out to the new *muzimo*, "Do not say that they did not keep me well." The "mother" follows him saying, "Beer. Cool yourself. Do not say that we have neglected you." As each does this, he or she calls out the name of the dead person. After dancing briefly on the grave, they kneel and clap. The "mother" then calls upon all the *mizimo* to receive this new spirit.

With this all is finished, but the *mukalolo* branch remains on the grave so that all who pass may know that the funeral is ended. The chief mourners once shaved their heads – now done only by women while men remove only some token hair. This removes all contamination associated with the mourning period. Any remaining firewood may be used to maintain the fire on the grave which finally goes out when the firewood is exhausted. I am told this is done in order to dry and harden the ground so that animals cannot dig up the grave, but if a funeral has been halted, the fire on the grave was once kept going until the funeral could be reopened and completed, even if this was months later. Shortages of firewood may now make this too onerous. The fire was said to provide a place for the spirit to warm itself and to light its tobacco so that it did not try to join the living around their fires. I suspect that firewood gathered for funeral fires must be used up at the grave because its association with death makes it incompatible with ordinary domestic use, but no Tonga has ever suggested this to me.

If a funeral must be halted, this is indicated by the use of the plant

malulwe (Cassia abbreviata): otherwise *malulwe* is used in the normal course of a funeral in the rituals of the third day when the focus shifts to renewed life. B. Reynolds (1968:240) reports that *malulwe* is used as a medicine for barrenness and for ritual cleansing after handling a corpse, but I have been told the *malulwe* is used for abortion, i.e., the interruption of a process, and that only *intungulu* is used after the handling of a corpse. *Malulwe* may also be used to ward off illness. During the influenza epidemic of 1918, the smallpox epidemic of 1925, and the time of many deaths in Lusitu in Gwembe North in 1959 after resettlement, neighbourhoods reportedly met together at a land shrine or on the outskirts of the village to drink a concoction made with *malulwe* while they called upon the illness to go to the west. But people rejected my attempts to find a connection between its use at such times and its role in the funeral. When a funeral is reopened today after having been closed with *malulwe*, a fire is built upon the grave and the funeral sequence begins at the point where it was interrupted. It may be a year or more after burial before a funeral is completed. Sometimes they are reopened only if a divination blames new misery upon failure to honour the dead. There is some urgency, however, to complete the process for until this is done, death pollution restricts the activities of some of the survivors.

On the Plateau and sometimes recently in Gwembe Valley, a further ritual takes place some months after the funeral ends. This is the *mweesho* when beer is made for the first offering to the new *muzimo*. Usually it was brewed at the homestead of death which, on the Plateau, was thereafter abandoned. The surviving spouse moved away, either to the homestead of a new husband chosen by the lineage in the case of a widow, or to the homestead of her own kin if she has refused inheritance. A widower built a new homestead on another site. On the Zambezi Plain, the house was rarely abandoned, but the beer, called *mwapaila*, "offering", was brewed at the homestead of the inheritor. Whether *mweesho* or *mwapaila*, the ritual was carried out only if an adult died, for it is the *mizimo* of adults who exert power over descendants and members of their lineages. Plateau Tonga, indeed, insisted that in the past only adults who had been given the right to make beer in their own homes became *mizimo*, i.e., only those who had previously provided hospitality to the *mizimo* could become

mizimo and receive hospitality in their turn (Colson 1962:58-59).

With the end of the funeral and the flow of life back into the homesteads of the living, the grave site loses its importance. In most areas its surface merges back into the working space of the homestead. It is true that the small hut (*kaanda*) built at a land shrine may be said to mark the spot where the first settler, a former leader, or a *basangu* medium is buried, but this symbolizes the vanished homestead rather than the grave. The nearest thing to a cult of the grave is found in Gwembe South where various possessions are piled around the grave, soon to deteriorate (B. Reynolds 1968:25-27). During appeals for rain and at the funeral of senior members of the *katongo* lineage, mourners may dance briefly at each grave and call out an invocation to senior men and women buried there. Even here the great majority of graves are soon ignored. In other areas, graves were unmarked until very recently when those who could afford it began to follow town custom by marking graves with a cement block. I know of no offerings being made at such sites, but in graveyards associated with towns and missions, artificial flowers placed at the grave signify remembrance.

During the funeral the spirit, and thereafter the *muzimo*, may be said to be wandering in the bush, yet nothing in the funeral symbolism seems to refer to the bush unless the twigs of the various plants used during the course of the funeral serve this purpose. Instead, the emphasis is upon the relationship of the dead to the human community which must come to terms with the death and regroup itself, finding others to play the roles once filled by the dead and negotiating with the newly emergent *muzimo* to ensure continuity.

Christianity and the Challenge of Death

Because the funeral ritual is phrased to emphasize the continuity of spirit and its acquisition of a new identity in the form of the *muzimo*, much of the funeral ritual is banned by Christian churches. These have tried to substitute rituals of their own. I have seen young men, after helping to dig a grave and handle a corpse, refuse to participate in the ritual washing at the grave when the burial was completed. Instead, they stood at the foot of the grave to recite a prayer learned at church. *Budima* performances have become rare and less satisfying, as young men and women under church influence refuse to participate in

what they describe as “heathen practices”. Cleansing through sexual intercourse is banned, and so non-Christians and many who are only partially convinced adherents, think themselves subject to death pollution because Christian kin refuse to play their appropriate roles. Cleansing through sexual intercourse with the surviving spouse is being abandoned because of the fear of HIV infection (Colson 2002), but the churches also ban the alternative form of *kuchuuta*. Inheritance of the *muzimo* continues in most instances, for if a Christian refuses to take the spirit, another member of the lineage is usually willing to accept the responsibility. This means in Gwembe Central and those villages resettled in Gwembe North, that one or two members of the lineage are becoming something like universal inheritors for the *mizimo* of the lineage. Even if inheritance takes place, many divinations attribute current illness or other troubles to a slighting of the funeral ritual that has angered a *muzimo* into retaliating against kin, both Christians and non-Christians.

Death today creates new dilemmas, for at each death people must make choices about whether to conform with the demands of the spirits and unconverted kin, or the strictures of the churches. Once, a funeral, though fraught with emotion and sometimes suspicion that broke out into verbal and physical violence, was an occasion on which communities composed of kin and neighbours mobilized to help survivors cope with the loss of death and the reordering of their social world. Today, a funeral may well be a demonstration of divisiveness, for not all are Christians, and Christians belong to different denominations and do not agree about how death should be mourned and survivors reincorporated into society. Even devout Christians, who follow the routines of their church, may feel at a loss. They know that they continue to relate to the dead who appear to them in dreams or of whom they are otherwise reminded. Some churches teach that death removes a person from all contact with those left behind. Others teach that if the dead survive in a form that communicates with the living, it is as evil demons. They also teach that the fate of the spirit after death depends upon how one live in this life. All of this is alien to the old teaching that the dead continue in another form as *mizimo*, irrespective of how they conducted themselves during their lifetime, and that they continue to be nearby, moving about the homesteads of their kin, but also forgoing with the other dead who live a spirit life modelled on that

of this world. They look to their kin for the nurturing that guarantees them a place of respect among their fellow dead, and in turn give protection to their kin. For many, this is maybe more comforting than the possibility of survival in a remote, unknown heaven.

CHAPTER IX

EVIL AND WITCHCRAFT

Diary, Musulumba Village, January 1999

This is the matter of the death of H and the death of B (elders and brothers-in-law). I heard this matter from people but it is surely true. B is the one who witched H. H had a divination to a far away *mung'anga* when he was very ill. The *mung'anga* told H, "The witch is B, your brother-in-law." H said, "Truly." "This person wishes to kill you and that is why you are ill." The *mung'anga* said to H, "You are not going to recover you. He has already killed you." The *mung'anga* said to H, "Do you want him to die?" H and his children all agreed. Then the *mun'ganga* said, "You will see that he is going to die soon. After he is dead, then you will die."Truly B has died. The day he died many people were very happy because he was a witch. He killed just anybody, including those who were not of his lineage. Now in the village there remains only one elder who bewitches a lot. He also bewitches those of other lineages and causes much unhappiness. On the day when he dies, many in the village are going to be happy. ... *Leza* looks at the person who has done bad things of witchcraft.... All witches die a bad death. ... *Leza* alone knows everything.
(Benard Simalabali)

Witchcraft as the Agent of Evil

Until Christianity introduced the idea of Satan and demons, permanently at war with goodness, evil (*bubi*) was a human attribute and it worked through human perversion of natural forces or control of ghosts and other creatures brought into being through the use of medicine (*musamu*, also translated as charm though its most general meaning is tree or plant). *Basangu* spirits or the spirits of dead kin caused trouble, but were not thought to do this because of malice, nor were they regarded as evil until the churches so designated them. They could be propitiated if people carried out their legitimate demands, and they also served as protectors. I have heard people speak of an animal, such as a poisonous snake or crocodile or lion, as evil, but only if it attacks. In that case it is regarded as an agent of human malevolence. Only humans have *munyono*, which can be translated as envy or malice. This leads to a desire to harm those who have what one wants or who thwart one in some fashion. Only humans have

ambition (*kuyanda kusumbuka*, “a desire to raise oneself”, or *kulitunta*, “to inflate oneself”) that makes them willing to harm others to advance their own interests. Both envy and ambition are the sources of much human suffering, but primacy is given to ambition: the desire to be preeminent and to have more than is obtainable through one’s own labour and the assistance of the ancestors.

Benard Simalabali, in his diary for 1999, summed up what he believes to be the qualities of a good person, when he wrote of a man recently dead:

He was a person of *Leza*. 1) He had no quarrel with anyone. 2) He uttered no scandal. 3) He did not bewitch. 4) He liked to joke with children and adults. 5) He loved the Church very much on Sunday. 6) He liked herding and milking cattle.

Many would echo him. Tonga think it possible for people to live out their lives as good men and women in harmony with others, in the order created by *Leza*.

It is disorder rather than order that Tonga think needs explanation. A well ordered natural world, good health and social harmony are explicable, as due to the original intention of *Leza*, or they are taken for granted. When the natural world threatens the human community through drought or other disturbances, or individuals suffer, or there is bad feeling in the community, an explanation is sought either in human error or human intention. Human error requires propitiation of the spirit found to have taken offence. Intention to cause harm is evil. However, it is not associated with witchcraft (*bulozi*, from the verb *kulowa*), unless it is activated secretly.

The witch shares some characteristics with the man who kills another in battle or open fight. The latter was purified to drive away the ghost (*celo*) of the one killed which otherwise would continue to attach itself to him and empower any blow he struck. People do not equate this empowerment with witchcraft, presumably because the killer struck a visible blow. In 2001, I was present when a Lusitu man, fresh from being imprisoned for the beating to death of his small son, was informed of the divination on his matter: before living with other people, he must be treated to drive away two ghosts, the ghost of his

child and the ghost whose earlier presence had made his blow lethal. Otherwise he might kill again. This is reminiscent of forcing a witch to undergo cleansing, but I was told the killer was not a witch although his violence made him dangerous.

People agree that open anger (*bukali*), murder, theft, backbiting, and quarrelling are disruptive and wrong: they are bad things to do. Spirit inheritors are discouraged from gossiping because the *mizimo* that cluster close behind them may take umbrage and attack the subject of his or her complaints. But while all of this is dangerous or bad, it is not witchcraft. The *basangu* medium is also seen as working with powers that may affect humans adversely, but such mediums work publicly at the behest of *basangu* that have chosen them as vehicles. The spirits, not they, are responsible for what happens. The witch, on the other hand, is not called to this work by *basangu* or *mizimo*. I have never heard it said that the *muzimo* of a dead witch had tried to pass on knowledge of witchcraft to kin. This is one more indication that witches are seen as unwanted traffickers in power who foist themselves upon a community.

Douglas (1970:xxvi) suggests that witchcraft symbols universally play upon “the theme of vulnerable internal goodness attacked by external powers” and that the witch is always “an attacker and deceiver. He uses what is impure and potent to harm what is pure and helpless.” The Tonga certainly consider victims to be vulnerable and that the witch uses “what is impure and potent”, but they recognize that victims need not be pure or innocent, for witches attack one another and they choose their victims not because they are pure or good but because they are angry with them or their kin or wish to gain from their depletion or death.

I think most Tonga conceive of witchcraft as involving the joint presence of three attributes: possession of magical power obtained through the acquisition of medicines, intent to cause harm, and the secrecy in which this is done. The emphasis given to motive removes the activities of the witch from the world of religious action, where the inner motives of the actors are not probed but action is observed (Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994:94, 97). People cannot see the action of the witch, but infer both action and intent from the effect, for witchcraft is hidden. It is therefore more dangerous and more feared than open aggression, which people feel they can deal with.

I follow English-speaking Tonga in translating *bulози* as witchcraft rather than sorcery, although the Tonga witch (*mulози*) becomes a witch voluntarily, works through medicines or charms, and has no in-born witchcraft substance which in some regions is thought to empower the witch (Evans-Pritchard 1937). Janzen (1992:90-91) says that *dog*, the cognate verb in proto-Bantu, refers to all “sources of affliction – sorcery, witchcraft, backbiting – that result from relations within the closely knit human community.” This may have been true of Tonga witchcraft in the past, but, as the closely knit human community expanded during the twentieth century into what has been called a global village, fear of witchcraft appears to have intensified, as it has elsewhere in Africa, and to have spread to incorporate any situation where ambition, possible advantage, envy, or just sheer rage may operate (cf., Geschiere 1997; Bond and Ciekawy, eds. 2001; Niehaus 2001).

Other Zambians, though not the Yombe on the border with Tanzania (Bond 2001:142), talk of witches belonging to associations whose members owe feasts of human flesh to one another, taking it in turn to kill a relative (B. Reynolds 1963:26, 44-57; Marwick 1965:76-79; Crehan 1997:192; Geschiere 1997:40, 62; Auslander 1998:394; Willis 1999:132.) The Tonga witch did not feast on victims: meat hunger is no part of the witch’s motivation, perhaps because with their stock the Tonga suffered less from protein deficiency. In the 1990s witches were sometimes said to have killed because they wanted to eat meat, but this was to feast on stock slaughtered for the funeral. Cannibalism may have become conceivable, however, by the 1970s when *madyabantu* (“eaters of people”) was one of the new forms of *masabe* possession. It was said to have been brought to Zambia from Kenya where cannibalism was said to exist. But I have only one account, from 1972, that accused a Tonga of killing and then consuming the victim’s flesh, and he was said to have recently returned after many years of living in the Congo. If Tonga witches were said to drain the life force from their victims and to remove body parts from the graves of the newly dead, this was for use in witchcraft medicines.

Tonga witches also acted independently, following the Tonga preference for personal autonomy, formulated in the expression, “Each person, his/her own law”. Douglas (1978), as discussed in Chapter Two, regards such individualism as characteristic of those

who rank low on her scale for grid, i.e. social differentiation. Increasingly, however, village society is becoming diversified in terms of status, and people also organize for group ventures. This is partly under the impetus of their political rulers. Since colonial days they have been urged to organize in cooperatives. During the one-party state from 1973-1991, local governance was organized through the party structure. Various international donor organizations, now so much a part of local life, require people to organize in committees and cooperatives to obtain benefits, including emergency food. Rural neighbourhoods since the early 1980s have fielded an ever growing number of single-purpose committees, each with chair, secretary, and sometimes treasurer. The various churches also provide a variety of offices and encourage the creation of committees or other groups. Rural communities now would rank low on neither grid nor group scale. This makes it conceivable that witches too may cooperate.

From the 1940s through the 1970s, Tonga witch lore featured the solitary witch who owed nothing to anyone unless it be the original instructor on the medicine. It was in 1972 that I first heard of gangs engaged in a search for human blood and organs, but it was only in the 1980s that references to them grew frequent, and even then, until the late 1990s, the gangs were said to be composed of outsiders. In the 1990s also, came divinations in which local people were accused of cooperating in witchcraft: in one instance, a man and his sister's son were accused together, in another it was a man and his paternal half-brother.

While witchcraft is said to be evil, people may be uncertain as to whether the witch intended to cause harm on this particular occasion, since some medicines once acquired can act independently. In practice, this makes for considerable ambiguity, abetted by the multiple meanings of *musamu*, which includes such things as baking powder, fertilizer, pesticides, the potions of the herbalist, home remedies, etc. English speakers may clarify the meaning by saying that witchcraft medicine or luck medicines are charms or magic medicines. Most adults acquire medicines or charms, and even youngsters seek medicines for physical strength or to enhance their sexual attraction. The acquisition of protective medicines is a legitimate act, expected of the man who has acquired a household or a homestead.

Diary, Siabwengo, Gwembe Central, September 1999

At Munyumbwe and Siabwengo they have found Tonga medicines against the people who steal cattle. Many people die because of stealing cattle. ...Some die because their brothers have stolen cattle. Nobody now is stealing cattle at Siabwengo or Munyumbwe. They told me, "I don't have this, but if my cattle are stolen, the one selling it is going to die. And no one should buy if he wants to live".

(Benard Siamalabali)

There is disagreement about whether protecting crops, stock or other property against theft with medicine that kills the thief is a form of witchcraft: some say they would not use such measures because the thieves might be their own children. People say there is no inherent evil in acquiring medicines to increase one's herd. Women acquire love medicines, including those to make a husband or lover impotent with another woman. Men regard such medicines as witchcraft, but women regard them as legitimate tools that women need in a polygynous society where men think themselves free to pursue other women (Keller 1978). Acquiring *indilile* medicine is also borderline, for the man who has it is ensuring vengeance after death if he dies from witchcraft. To prevent the medicine from working, he should be buried without wailing and no stock should be killed for him: either action sets the medicine to work to wipe out one after another members of the lineage of the one responsible for his death.

The evil of the witch lies in the antisocial motivation which makes the witch an enemy of kin and neighbours. Those accused of being witches, and found with witchcraft medicines, often claim that they had acquired what they thought were protective medicines, or medicines to help them in their work, and did so without any intention to harm others. If harm has been done, it is not because they are malicious or avaricious or overly ambitious, but because they were deceived. Or, the medicines have chosen to work on their own. This last is given some credence because medicines used for success in hunting, like those of witchcraft, may require ghostly sustenance. If the owner does not supply this, they choose their own victims among his kin, and eventually turn on the owner himself. Witchfinders and diviners are

at least potential witches because they control medicines which can be used to kill. Hunters, professional fishermen, and skilled craftsmen are both admired and suspect of empowerment through dangerous medicines as well as helpful *mizimo*. School teachers, businessmen, and politicians are assumed to rise through the use of medicines. A Gwembe Central man argued that two men of his area undoubtedly were witches, as witchfinders had recently proclaimed, because one had risen to a position of importance at Maamba coal mine in Gwembe South, while the other had held a government job: they had been very successful, therefore they must have had medicines, and these in turn were responsible for the deaths of their children.

A few men become notorious as witches. They may be said to contest with rival witches in veritable duels (*kulowanyina*, "to bewitch one another"). Suspicion of other men and women is usually latent, and there is rarely complete agreement that someone is a witch. You cannot tell from outward demeanour, for the smiling man or woman may be covering malice. People also experience others differently. Divinations, therefore, are often contested. People may agree that the person has powerful medicines, but disagree on whether he or she has the disposition of a witch, or about whether the person is the likely actor in this particular case. When a village does agree and expels someone as a witch, the person is usually accepted by a nearby village where his or her reputation is known. When I have asked why, the answer has been: "We don't know if he is a bad person. He has done nothing bad here." Those accused of witchcraft, who quickly agree to be cleansed and have their medicines destroyed, may be said to be "good people who caused no trouble." In practice, therefore, people judge rumored witches as individuals. It is in the abstract that people can agree that witchcraft and witches are unequivocally evil, and so are to be feared and hated. It is also in the abstract that they agree on what witches do, but any detailed knowledge of witchcraft procedures is denied: "only witches know what they do."

Witches may harm homesteads, villages, and neighbourhoods, as well as individuals. Since the 1940s, I have heard spells of dry weather during the rainy season attributed to witches who for some reason have caught or driven away the rains, sometimes for gain, sometimes for spite. At a 1947 meeting at Nampeyo on the Plateau, the elders announced that one of the young men had caught the rain, and they

threatened to summon a witchfinder to discover and punish the culprit (Colson et al. 1991:67). In 1956, various explanations offered for failure of the rains in Chezia (a Gwembe Central neighbourhood), included a *basangu* medium's announcement that someone, angry with the neighbourhood, had caught the rain in a pot. In the 1980s and 1990s, variants on this theme occurred both on the Plateau and at various places in Gwembe Valley. But the suggested motives reflected the fact that people no longer had a common interest in rain: they followed different trades, used different agricultural techniques and grew different crops. They wanted rain at different times or perhaps none at all. So the spoiler of the rains might be said to be someone who needed a dry spell because his crop had ripened early, or someone whose crop was already blighted and so wanted to blight the crops of others. At Musulumba, resettled in Lusitu in Gwembe North, the culprit was sometimes said to live in a nearby Goba village, at other times he or she was a fellow villager, or a foreign fisherman who wanted good weather for fishing in the Zambezi. On one occasion in the late 1990s, a destitute man who had settled in the village, where he was supported by the Catholic mission, was ordered to stop holding the rain, and then expelled from the village when the rain did not come.

The Witches

Only children, who are said to have no malice, are exempt from suspicion. While some say witchcraft runs in families or lineages, any adult is a potential suspect. Men are said to be prone to witchcraft because of their competitiveness; and to have the most dangerous medicines because they have the mobility and resources to seek them out. As they grow older and become more ambitious, they also become more envious of the good fortune of others and more fearful of attack if they themselves prosper. They try to obtain medicines to protect themselves and their dependents and to obtain wealth. Some are said to obtain medicines from kin – a Chezia man's early entry into the ranks of suspected witches was attributed to his grandmother's gift of medicines she had originally been given by her husband. Some medicines, like the hunting medicines described in Chapter Five, are given with instructions that the man must activate them by having sexual relations with a woman of his lineage – mother, sister, or sister's

daughter – and/or he must kill a near relative whose ghost (*celo*) then works with the medicine. In either case, he empowers himself by acts that violate the basic rules of kinship.

In associating men with witchcraft, especially the more powerful forms, the Tonga resemble the Lungu of Northern Zambia (Willis 1999:129ff) rather than the majority of other Zambians who commonly accuse old women (Colson 2000:336-337). From the 1940s through the late 1990s, I found women most commonly accused of using medicines either to hold their husbands or to harm co-wives. It was in the late 1990s, when Gwembe women began to build up cattle herds and engage in business, that they became targeted by witchfinders and the accusations were accepted as credible, reflecting the Tonga suspicion of all who succeed. Since labour to build successful enterprises is thought to be supplied by the ghosts of those the witch has killed or by the captured life force of other victims, success, in any field, is suspicious. On the other hand, those who are poorer than their fellows, or who suffer from some disability, may also be suspect because, it is assumed, they will be full of resentment and envy and will find ways to harm the fortunate. In practice, suspicion usually focuses on close associates: kin, neighbours, or fellow workers.

Some situations seem to generate tensions that end in accusations of witchcraft. Rural schools have become such flash points, for many reasons. Parents become angry when children are disciplined or fail examinations. Badly paid as the teachers are, they are thought to live at a standard above that available to most local people, and they use their salaries to hire people to work in their fields. They quarrel with one another over space and work loads. Many feel out of place in a rural area where they have to live among strangers and without the town amenities they went through their training to obtain. Frequently they are accused of being witches, or they think themselves attacked by the witchcraft of the people of the area. As a consequence, schools are often closed or poorly staffed because many of their teachers have fled. In 1998, for instance, only one teacher remained at a Lusitu school: the others had “fled the ghosts that come from the village and are sent to the teachers. These things come at night to the houses of the teachers. People are afraid of dying. Sometimes the things are only seeking food in the houses and have been sent to eat at the school.”

In the past, despite all talk of lineage solidarity, men of one's own lineage were prime suspects. Competition to become spirit inheritors and controllers of lineage property, or headmanship, led senior men to suspect both their contemporaries and younger men who might seek to supplant them. Junior men suspected seniors of trying to prevent their rise. Since the 1980s, fathers have become prime suspects. I have suggested that this is associated with both plough agriculture and cash cropping, especially of cotton with its heavy labour demand, which have led men increasingly to take advantage of their right to control and benefit from the labour of wives and children, leading in turn to much resentment and feelings of exploitation at a time when younger men find it difficult to find jobs or land elsewhere (Colson 2000). But when people search for the person behind some affliction, they try to remember suspicious actions. They also canvas all the occasions on which they have been at odds with others, and all whom they suspect of having a grudge against themselves. So co-wives accuse each other of attacks on themselves or their children. Women think of men they have scorned. Employees think of fellow employees who may be their competitors, and Christians consider others in the same congregation who compete with them for leadership. Dreams may show the witch in action. Divination helps them to sort through the various possibilities to find the most likely causes of their trouble.

Witchcraft as Social Control and Excuse

It has been argued that the fear of witchcraft plays a positive role in many African communities, and it is obvious that witchcraft fears form one of the constraints that maintain surface harmony in Tonga villages. People control their own emotions, even when they are furious, for fear of angering someone who may be a witch. I remember the agonized tone of a Gwembe Central father, as he muttered restraining words when his angry son confronted a man notorious for his witchcraft. They may share generously with others to avoid arousing hostility. One woman explained the sharing of scarce seed with a remote kinswoman: "How can you know she is not a witch?" Fear of witchcraft is said to deflect those with land hunger from encroaching over field boundaries, or holding on to a disputed field: "Many many Tonga are afraid of quarrelling over boundaries because they are afraid of being

bewitched". On the other hand, if the encroacher is feared as a witch, the owner of the field may be afraid to protest. Fear of medicines used to protect crops and other property is said to deflect at least some from theft. Thieves may also return stolen property when the owner threatens to bewitch whoever was responsible. In his diary, Christopher Nkiwani of Musulumba wrote of a thief returning a stolen blanket when an enraged Lusitu elder shouted:

Why didn't the one who took the blanket to cover his wife or his children come and tell how he had no blanket so people around him could help him. I can say that person who took the blanket is going to see what will happen. He is going to be hit by lightning.

Although theft is said to have always existed, in the years of Zambia's economic decline it has become more common both in the towns and in rural areas. Concomitantly, there is more talk of the use of medicines to protect property against theft. In the 1990s also, illness or other problems were more often attributed to the sufferer having stolen goods so protected. This was the 1998 death divination of a Chezia woman who was said to have stolen protected property while living in Lusaka as a market woman.

The other side of the coin is that people are aware that fear of their possible medicines gives them an advantage if they press claims, and they overtly or covertly suggest that the fear is justified. The elder intent on getting his blanket back made overt threats. On other occasions, angry people shouted that they would send to obtain medicines to destroy the unknown offender. Covert threats are more common. It is enough to say, "Well, you will see what may happen", implying an intention to make something happen. Or, one smiles.

Women may be particularly vulnerable to their fear of those with medicines, but they are also less likely than men to think themselves protected by medicine against witchcraft attacks. In the 1950s, Gwembe women often said that they agreed to be inherited on a husband's death because they feared that his kin would bewitch them, or their children, if they refused. Some are still fearful. A 1999 Gwembe Central divination accused a man of bewitching his brother's widow who had refused to

marry him after he had cleansed her of death pollution. By this time, however, kin rarely were willing to inherit a widow for fear that her husband had died of AIDS. Many widows still are afraid to contest claims on the husband's estate by his kin, despite their knowledge that Zambian law, since 1989, gives them and their children the right to inherit much of the property. They may try to secrete some of it with their own kin, as women have always done, but then have illness attributed to their affines's witchcraft or the anger of the husband's *muzimo*. Fear of the witchcraft of their own kin may also coerce women into leaving a husband who is in arrears with elopement damages or bridewealth payments or has otherwise antagonized her kin. In 1994, a Gwembe Central woman gave way when her mother's brother threatened to bewitch her, her husband, or her children. Men have also threatened to bewitch wives who challenged their authority, as did an angry Lusitu man, fresh from beer, who appears in the diary of Stanard Sialenga: "He told his wife that if she plays about with him, she can be bewitched. He added that it is easier to witch than to eat and that he has already bewitched his mother and that is why she is always ill."

Behaviour probably is more circumspect because people fear that they themselves will be accused of being witches if others think them stingy or quarrelsome or if they have made threats. Men are most likely to hint about witchcraft medicines when they are drunk, an increasingly likely occurrence since beer became commercialized (in Gwembe Valley in the 1950s and much earlier on the Plateau), and hurriedly deny on the following day that they could have said such things. Under Zambian law, inherited from the colonial regime, it is possible to sue for slander if someone accuses you of being a witch, or even asks if you can provide medicine that might cause harm, and this includes medicines for abortion. Only clan joking partners are exempt from prosecution, and charges and countercharges of witchcraft are a common part of the joking exchange. Songs composed for neighbourhood drum teams (*Ngoma*), are another privileged venue. While they may memorialize a local scandal, they are usually scurrilous attacks on a rival neighbourhood, in which local notables may be proclaimed as terrible witches. In 1993, a Chezia man, summoned before the local court for calling a man a witch, pleaded in his defense that the drum team song named the

accuser and his brother as the biggest witches in Chezia. The court dismissed the case, as is likely to happen if the defendant pleads that he was engaging in clan joking. In other cases, heavy damages have been awarded. This means that open accusations usually are made only by those who are drunk, very angry, very frightened, or know they have the backing of a divination or massive public support. Those accused resent the charge, and show themselves to be both humiliated and angry.

Despite frequent statements that life would go well if the witches could be forced to give up their witchcraft, it can be argued that people find some comfort in believing that what happens is due to witchcraft. Given that many of the problems people face today lie within the larger economic and political sphere over which they see themselves as having no power or influence, the image of the witch provides an immediate focus for pent up anger and frustration, for here they can do something. The tolerance of witchfinding by government since the early 1970s both encourages local people to accuse one another and deflects anger from the shortcomings of its own officials. But belief in witchcraft also provides individuals with an explanation for personal failure, since witchcraft is invoked to explain why people behave foolishly or do more poorly than others, as well as why they fall ill or die. Consequently, those who otherwise might have to face their own deficiencies, can think of themselves as blameless victims. The lazy man or woman who farms badly can blame a poor crop on witchcraft. The youngster who fails at secondary school argues that schoolmates recognized his great abilities and used witchcraft to remove him from competition, and his kin agree. Dropping out of school or leaving a job is justified by fear of the witchcraft of other students or fellow workers. Being bypassed for promotion or the loss of a job, is due to the medicines of envious fellow workers. While others may covertly gossip about failure due to laziness, short temper, stupidity and other personal flaws, the loser and his or her supporters prefer to blame the witch. The increasing salience of witchcraft may therefore reflect the increasing number of occasions wherein a person feels judged by others and finds reason to be dissatisfied.

Witchcraft Techniques

Witchcraft techniques are summarized in Table IV.

Table IV Technique	Tonga Term
Poisoning	<i>Kupa musamu ujaya</i>
Dancing	<i>Kuzyana</i>
Manipulation of medicines	<i>Ciposa, or citumwa</i>
Medicine horns	<i>Inzengo</i>
Witch gun	<i>Intobolo yabulozi</i>
Magic horses, or airplanes	<i>lhaci or Indeki ya musamu</i>
Crocodile medicine	<i>Musamu wantali</i>
Familiars created with medicines chicks, or similar creatures	<i>Buyowela</i>
Snake with human head	<i>Idomba</i>
Procurement of body parts or spirits for employer	<i>Banyama</i>

Witchcraft techniques include poisoning with plants, and today with battery acid and pesticides, as well as techniques using invisible forces to cause harm. One does not have to be a witch to acquire poisons – pesticides are readily available today in a farming community, and everyone knows some poisonous plants. It is the intention to cause harm secretly that leads to their identification with witchcraft, and undoubtedly both food and drink have been used as vehicles for poisoning. Beer drinks, which are often occasions when anger erupts into slanging matches or physical violence, are also possible venues for the use of poison. The woman who brews the beer, or the man playing host, is expected to drink first, to demonstrate that the beer is safe, but people still watch carefully in case one of the drinkers slips poison into the pot and only pretends to drink. Pesticides are said to be current favourite poisons in both beer and food, but the appearance of mould on stored grain is usually attributed to a witch having sent a ghost to urinate on the grain.

In the 1940s and 1950s, the most feared witches may have been the dancers (*bazyani*). They are said to work at night, going naked to dance or sit in the homestead or field of their victim, and they smile

as they canvass the troubles to come: "How sad that your child shall die!" "How tragic that you shall sicken". They continued to be feared for the rest of the century.

Diary from Musulumba Village, July 1982

There is a man in the village who is a witch and a wizard. During the night when all people are fast asleep, he goes naked to other people's homes to dance. When he dances, he also praises himself with a song.... This song means, 'We people dance during the night because during the day we feel shy'.

Diary August 1982

On Friday a man was founding dancing last night at J's house while he was naked. His naked body was whitened with ash. He was seen because the dog was barking, and he ran when he heard the noise of the dogs.

(Stanley Hastings Simalabali)

In 1998, a Gwembe Central diary report on the death of a local man commented that no one, including lineage kin and children, had mourned much because he had a charm for removing crops from other people's fields and was also said to dance at night in people's homesteads and fields.

Other witchcraft techniques involve the use of medicine-horns (*insengo*). Magic needles or other devices are thought to be sent from a distance to cause illness and death, or a charmed object is buried on the path or wherever the victim is likely to pass to poison whoever first steps there. These are classed together as *ciposo*, or, increasingly since the 1980s, as *citumwa*, a term learned in cities where the Mutumwa Nchimi movement flourished in the 1970s (Dillon-Malone 1988). In ciTonga, *kutumwa* means that something is being sent. *Ciposo* derives from the English term "to post", and is said to be anything that can be "posted" to the victim such as an invisible needle, like a syringe needle loaded with herbs or other medicines.

Diary, Musulumba, January 1997

(The diviner) came to their home in private. There he removed an *insengo* which was said to have caused illness in wife and grandchildren. He also removed a piece of a man's penis and two vaginas. He said these things were very dangerous to people and would kill in a short time. He also removed some Roman Catholic rosaries. He dressed the *insengo* with the rosaries. When the priest heard about this, he was not happy and tried to get the rosaries from the diviner. The man was made to pay the diviner four cattle.

(Stanard Sialenga)

A diviner diagnosed *ciposo* when my assistant from Chezia in Gwembe Central had a badly infected foot in 1963. The same diagnosis was given, in 1994, when a Lusitu man returned lamed from working in town:

The illness looks like he has been bewitched by someone. This kind of illness we say in ciTonga is *ciposo*. It comes from stepping on the medicine placed by someone. The witch... comes at night and places medicine at the door of your house. You get up early and you tread on it and you become ill.

Other witches are said to use charms to create familiars such as *buyowela* (which take the form of chicks), or the snake like *idomba*, or they operate through the ghosts (*zelo*) of those they have killed with their medicine. *Buyowela* were diagnosed when a woman was ill and fainted in a Lusitu village in 1994:

They are like baby chicks that cry all the time. They can fly through the air. They can eat the guts and the person should die in two days or one day. If the owner tells them to go and kill someone, saying the name, the person will certainly die.

The same year a child died in Chezia, in Gwembe Central, due, it was said, to a hole in her genitals and this was evidence that she had been eaten by *buyowela*, "the invisible small birds kept by witches." In 1998, the secondary school daughter of a teacher in Gwembe Central accused the deputy head teacher of bewitching her by sending small

magic dogs: these she had seen in her dreams. Familiars of any kind, along with ghosts, may be sent to drain crops from granaries or fields, or the life force (*muuyya*) from the living.

In Gwembe Valley, some men were said to use medicine to transform themselves into crocodiles, lions or other creatures in order to attack their victims.

Diary, Siameja Village, March 1996

S. was coming from the river when he saw a man coming his way wearing red trousers and a white shirt who changed into a lion and tried to kill S. S. cried loudly. Some baboons were nearby. They came near S. and the lion stopped attacking S. and chased the baboons.

(*Ward Siakapalu*)

In the 1990s, when hyenas crossed the Zambezi from Zimbabwe to invade Lusitu, in Gwembe North, tales circulated of men who transformed themselves into hyenas to attack small stock. Youngsters in one village asserted that they had seen a local man attach a hyena tail to his buttocks and turn into a hyena, only to turn back when he saw them.

While elsewhere in Zambia, accounts of witch guns have been current since at least the 1940s (Reynolds, B., 1963; Ngulube 1989: 147ff), I first heard of them in Gwembe Valley in 1982 at the same time that I began to hear of witch horses, airplanes, and motor vehicles. Since then references to witch guns as causing illness and/or death are common. Witchfinders frequently turn up objects called witch guns when they cleanse a homestead of witchcraft. While earlier forms of Tonga witchcraft were said to operate only within the vicinity of a witch, the witch gun can reach its victim anywhere. Along with the witch airplane, horse, or motor vehicle, the witch gun acknowledges the geographical mobility that scatters kin and other associates but at the same time keeps them in tenuous contact with each other.

Diary, Chezia, Gwembe Central, October 1995

The witchfinder found that MS has a human bone which he uses as a gun and that it is the bone of the child attacked by the crocodile. MS admitted to know about it and was made to pay

one cattle. He was also said to have witched many people and to have a magic hare which helps him weed the fields. On the 9th the witchfinder came ...to remove his witchcraft objects. He took a human bone which he said was a gun and a small duiker horn. (*Shadreck Siajebu*)

“Dancing” and the use of *ciposo* or familiars such as *buyowela* and ghosts, as well as the possession of crocodile medicine, are said to be old Tonga techniques known to the people of long ago, and they are part of the Southern African repertoire of witchcraft techniques. They reflect the very real fears of people dependent on physical fitness for survival and very conscious of the ambivalences and hostilities engendered by the close scrutiny of village life, where people know who has food and who has not. I am not sure whether the extraction of *muuya* is also considered part of the original Tonga repertoire. In the 1940s, people viewed the *idomba* as a recent introduction, and associated it with the knowledge available to labour migrants in the multiethnic centers of towns and mines. But fear of snake familiars has long been known elsewhere in the region. Labour migrants were said to have been taught, by men encountered at work, the technique needed to nurture a small grub on human blood until it turned into a snake with a human head and grew strong and powerful. Thereafter it could be sent out to rob granaries and houses as well as harm people. The owner had to continue to feed it, or it went out to find its own food and might ultimately turn on the owner.

Diary, Chezia, Gwembe Central, November 1998

PS has beaten the magic *idomba* in his house. The *idomba* was not really seen but PS saw light in his house and his children were crying because they were afraid. PS took the axe and started beating the magic *idomba*. It went outside the house still moving. PS called his older brother who came and saw the fire moving in the bush but he could not do nothing. PS only shouted threats at night to inform the owner of the *idomba* that it should not be kept carelessly and fed on other people's houses. They suspect the owner to be (their father's brother's son).

(*Willy Chikuni*)

The diaries of the 1990s also depict the *idomba* as seeking sexual union with women, who report waking at night to find an *idomba* entering them. When a Chezia woman miscarried for the second time in 1998, according to the diary of Willie Chikuni, people attributed this to intercourse with the *idomba* of her husband's mother's brother. Women also say that *idomba* or ghosts (*zelo*) have suckled at their breasts: one was a Lusitu woman who was reputed to have a sore on her breast because a witch-controlled ghost came to her at night to suckle.

Like earlier forms of witchcraft, an *idomba* is active only within a small area. Those afraid they are being targeted by one can escape by moving to another village or the next neighbourhood. If its owner dies or moves away, the *idomba* remains behind, attaching itself to some relative of the original owner. Those accused of housing an *idomba* frequently claim that they too are victims since the *idomba* attached itself to them without their will or knowledge. They may still be made to pay for cleansing. In the 1990s, when women were being accused of harbouring an *idomba*, this might be on the grounds that their blood had been used by the husband to nurture the emergent *idomba* or they had helped their husbands feed the mature *idomba*. Nevertheless, witchfinders included them in their roster of witches and amerced them for cleansing.

Idomba may be less feared now than distance-defying witch guns or magic horses, cars, and airplanes that transport the owner hundreds of miles in a second. You cannot escape these by moving away, for the witch so empowered can cause harm without respect to distance.

Musulumba Village, January 1982

There is a man in the village. ...During the night he rides his invisible horse and then he goes to witch other people's homes during the night. That man can travel during the night from Lusitu to the old Chipeco area and come back in the same day.
(Stanley Hastings Banda)

These tools of witchcraft are also said to have been purchased initially in urban areas, usually from Zambians from the west and northwest, but they are also trafficked in by aliens and are part of the current African witchcraft repertoire (Geschiere 1997).

Such embodiments of evil reflect the far flung social networks of

current Tonga lives, as well as an awareness of relative powerlessness in the face of the economic and political forces that determine much of their lives. Since the 1980s, they have also found new embodiments of the evil they perceive as preying on them in the form of *banyama* and, still more recently, what may be called body snatchers though the Tonga have no specific name for them as yet. *Banyama* are said to be gangs of men who roam the countryside to find victims to turn into zombies sent off to work for the employers of the gangs. These are usually identified as Europeans or Indians. Tonga learned of such activities when they began to work in Zambian towns after independence in 1964. Fear of *abanyama* had existed in northern and Eastern Zambia since the 1930s, when it was associated with a witchfinding movement that entered the country from what was then Nyasaland. This was at a time when much of Eastern Africa was pervaded with tales of gangs that drew blood or otherwise victimized people at the instructions of European employers (Fields 1985; Richards 1935; White 1995). I began to hear people talk of encounters with *banyama* in Gwembe Valley in the 1980s. They were always pictured as operating in the bush or on the roads. In the 1990s, when the media began to circulate stories of the theft of kidneys and other organs for transplant, people began to talk of gangs who hid in the bush or along the roads to wait for victims from whom they removed hearts and other organs. These, they sold to urban buyers, usually an Indian. The diaries report hearsay accounts of bodies found in the bush, with genitals and other organs removed.

Diary, Musulumba Village, March 1999

On 21 March they caught a person at Nkandabbwe who cuts out hearts. He was a stranger... When they heard what he was saying, they reported him to the police and they bound him with chains and beat him. Then he explained, "We are people who take the hearts of people. My friends are in the bush. We are many." After they chained him they took him to Chirundu Police Station that same day. He was beaten severely

April 1999

They were speaking ciBemba, but none of them had an identity card.

(Benard Simalabali)

The gangs initially were said to be composed of non-Tonga, including at times a European. The sight of a car containing a European and an African was enough to send villagers fleeing in 1996, both on the Plateau and in Gwembe Valley. In later years agents might be said to include unnamed local people, just as local people were said to be accomplices of the gangs of cattle thieves who came from the cities to steal Tonga cattle. People agreed that both *banyama* and body snatching were forms of witchcraft.

This transforms the nature and motivation of Tonga witchcraft, for those involved are unnamed persons without social ties to their victims; they act solely from a profit motive; and they view their victims as produce to be harvested and sold to strangers living in the cities. The most recent forms of witchcraft, therefore, cater to a sense of being victims in a world where those who control power and advantage neither know nor care about those they victimize. Placing the attacks in the bush draws on the old dichotomy between bush/wild and homestead/human society. It recalls the cry of Gwembe residents, faced with resettlement, that the Europeans were throwing them away in the bush where they would become like animals. Earlier fears of witchcraft reflected the fears people had of those with whom they were in immediate contact, who lived much as they did. The newest forms of witchcraft reflect the feeling people have of being exploited by outsiders, who are able to manipulate local agents.

It may be significant that people never talk of using divination or witchfinders to identify and gain control over *banyama* and body snatchers. When people turn to divination to find the cause of their troubles, they expect to find this due to the ambition or malice of immediate associates, especially kin, who usually live in the same village or neighbourhood, often within the same homestead, or who work in the same office, or in some way benefit from their misfortune. They think of the witch as acting against known others.

While successful business men and political figures, or anyone attaining prominence, are assumed to have medicines for witchcraft, this is for use against those within their immediate sphere and does not explain why the ordinary person falls ill or faces problems.

Diary, Musulumba Village, July 1999

There was a bishop who died in a road accident.... In Zambia they bewitch each other over the important seat of bishop. The one who died was a black person. Black people bewitch each other over an important position. ...Many bishops who are black Zambians die.

[Benard Simalabali]

Since the 1940s, I have been told that the original Tonga witchcraft medicines were nothing like as powerful as those controlled by people living elsewhere whose medicines Tonga learned when they travelled to other areas. Over the next sixty years, they continued to attribute the spread of new forms of witchcraft to contact with outsiders, though since the 1950s these have been increasingly resident foreigners. Fishermen from Western, Northwestern and Northern Provinces exploiting the fisheries of Kariba Lake or the Kafue or Zambezi Rivers are often mentioned as probable sources. If a local man is cited as the source of the new technique, he is frequently said to have originally acquired the medicines from strangers. Witchcraft, therefore, is acquired from outside the immediate local community but becomes internalized within it. When people first began to relate tales of *banyama* and body snatchers, these too were outsiders, but by the end of the century, they began to be envisaged as including local people who were prepared to sell their own people as produce to the towns.

The Prevalence of Witchcraft

Fear of witchcraft is reported to have skyrocketed throughout Southern Africa over the last decades of the twentieth century, among both rural and urban people (Bond and Ciekawy 2001; Comroff and Comroff 1992; Geschiere 1997; Niehaus 2001). I was certainly not as conscious of witchcraft in the 1940s and 1950s as in later years, and on occasion heard men and women say it was pointless to try to identify a witch because it would only get you into trouble if you did anything to the witch. The new frequency with which people are accused of being witches, reflects, no doubt, the virtual abrogation of laws, introduced during the colonial period, that made such accusations a crime. Once

the laws became administered by those who themselves believed in witchcraft, they became something of a dead letter. In 1968, I was present at a local court hearing on the Plateau where a witchfinder sued for payment of his fee, and the court upheld the claim on the grounds that he had an enforceable contract. But the salience given to witchcraft in contemporary Africa can also be attributed to tensions associated with political and economic conditions which cause many to feel themselves beleaguered.

The 1960s and early 1970s, for many in Zambia, as elsewhere in Africa, was a time when life seemed to be rapidly improving. Independence from colonial rule brought an end to many humiliating restrictions. The way opened for men and women with schooling and ambition to advance rapidly into jobs being vacated by Europeans. The government built more schools and health centres, provided extension services, built and maintained roads, and created marketing arrangements for rural produce. Death rates declined rapidly. Health improved. Rural enterprises became more lucrative. There were good jobs in the towns. Much was expected of the future. In the mid 1970s, this changed, with declining world prices for African products and the inroads of the Cold War. By the 1980s, even many with elite jobs felt the effect, as government debts mounted along with inflation. University faculty, for one, found they needed one or two additional sources of income beside their university salaries to maintain themselves and their families.

By then, services provided by government in rural areas were restricted, or disappeared, or began to depend on the charity of an ever increasing number of international organizations that provided short-term grants to fund projects that seemed to them worthy of support. They largely replaced the Zambian government as the provider of funds to build and maintain schools and health centres, run extension services, build roads and check dams, and provide boreholes, but they did so only in some places and could not be counted on for permanent support. Tonga villagers were also challenged by conditions peculiar to their area. On the Plateau, where people had depended on plough agriculture since the 1930s, the arrival of East Coast Fever in the 1980s depleted cattle herds to the point that many were back to hoe agriculture. Plateau soils also showed the effect of years of

overcropping and use of commercial fertilizers: soils that produced maize in the 1940s and 1950s were under sweet potatoes in the 1990s. Gwembe Valley lost much its best soils in 1958 with the formation of Kariba Lake. Even initially, most resettlement areas were overpopulated in terms of the carrying capacity of the land, without taking into consideration expected population growth due to high birth rates (Clark et al. 1995). As fields were kept under cultivation instead of fallowed, yields fell. The 1980s saw both an increased competition for land in Gwembe and emigration to the western plateau, to land that had been national forest land, or north into Central Province.

The old resource of labour migration was largely foreclosed by Zambia's declining economy. Those who found life difficult in the village, or hoped to equip themselves through wage work, could no longer expect to find work in town even if they had secondary school education. Many who had jobs lost them. Tonga vocabulary was enriched by a new English word: "pruned". Inflation also made it difficult for many to continue to live in towns, even if they had jobs. Those made redundant, or defeated by the gap between wages and living costs, who returned to a village usually had to depend on kin for fields and tools, as did the young who could find no work elsewhere. In consequence, young men and women found themselves increasingly subject to their seniors.

Morbidity and mortality rates rose again after the 1970s. Hospitals and health centres, especially those in rural areas, were understaffed and often lacked medical supplies. From the 1980s on, AIDS became an increasing drain on resources, as people came home from the towns to die, and HIV infection spread through the villages. Malaria and tuberculosis, controlled in the 1960s and 1970s, reemerged as debilitating illnesses. By the end of the century, it was estimated that 21% of the Zambian population, between the ages of 15 and 50, was infected with HIV, although fear of stigmatization kept many from learning or revealing their status (UNAIDS 2000). Death became more salient, everywhere, as the number of deaths rose, and funerals absorbed an ever greater proportion of time and other resources. Wailing became the common background sound against which daily life was lived out. I have heard it suggested that many Zambians, by 2000, were behaving as though they suffered from clinical depression. They

had reason to be depressed. Many were ill, or worn out with caring for the ill, and the poor felt their poverty more severely, contrasting this with their earlier hopes and achievements and with the prosperity of the few who were able to live well.

The malaise and the belief that one worked without proper reward lie behind the growing frequency of witchcraft accusations and resort to witchfinders. They also influence the form witchcraft fears are taking, as does the increasing social stratification. Despite the bad times, some have been able to prosper, even in rural areas. Those with money or grain are able to profit from their poorer neighbours, by hiring them to work in their fields or as cattle herds. They also buy up stock at bargain prices when drought strikes and those with poor harvests sacrifice everything to obtain food.

The last decades of the twentieth century were associated with increasing complaints that *muuya* was being stolen during the night by witches who used it as forced labour. People woke to find themselves without energy and with aching bodies because they had spent the night working in the witch's field or in some other enterprise. Or men claimed that their loss of potency was due to their father's or patron's use of their *muuya* to service the father's or patron's cows. Nighttime fears reflected daytime perceptions. Young men said that the old men were causing great trouble to young men, and they threatened to summon witchfinders to test all the old men of the village and force them to give up their witchcraft. At the same time, tales of *banyama* and body snatchers reflected their belief that they were being badly governed by those who cared nothing for them, a frequent complaint, and that they were being exploited by a remote elite, foreign and Zambian, who took advantage of their helplessness. In 2002, Gwembe Tonga were considering trying to sue the World Bank and the United States in the World Court for damages because they had helped to finance Kariba Dam and so deprived them of their land and what in retrospect was seen as an idyllic existence.

The turn to the Christian churches, during these same years, may be fuelled by the same factors that have led to increased fear of witches, but one does not exclude the other. For many Christians, it is witchcraft rather than the will of God or the consequences of one's own sin that explains why they suffer from illness or other difficulties. In the 1980s

and 1990s, some of the pentecostal churches of various origins began to identify and cleanse witches (Ute Luig 1998). Other churches preach against belief in witchcraft, and some of their adherents accept this, although they may continue to fear witches. Some may refuse to attend divinations on the grounds that they are Christians, but they listen to divinations obtained by those who consult diviners on their behalf. They accuse others, including fellow Christians, of witchcraft and join with non-Christians in the summoning of witchfinders to cleanse particular witches or to test the whole village for witchcraft and deal with those found guilty.

Divination and Witchfinding

The rumours that circulate through a village when someone is ill or anything disastrous happens reflect the complex fears and hostility that exist beneath the surface and erupt in witchcraft accusations. Each incident usually turns out to be only one episode in an on-going battle of some kind. Some of the complexities appear in the rumours surrounding the 1998 death of a Gwembe Central woman. At first she was said to have been killed by a charm, compounded partly of a rock lizard (*cikwanta*), that had already killed her father-in-law. It had been obtained by her husband who suspected his father of bewitching his mother and wanted to kill him. He had his wife cook the charm with porridge which was given to her father-in-law, but she also ate some of it herself unknowingly. Her lineage asked her husband to pay compensation for causing her death. The divination reported at her funeral, however, found that she had been hit by a ghost staying in the house of her mother-in-law, i.e., that she had been killed by the angry ghost of her father-in-law to punish his son. Shortly afterwards, a man died in her husband's village. Some attributed this to the same porridge, saying he had been summoned to share the food. Others thought he was more likely to have died from medicine associated with a wire snare from which he had stolen an animal, or the medicines associated with the fishing nets he had stolen in 1986.

Another involved case from the same area arose over clashing opinions about the deaths of four siblings, children of a successful man who had seen to it that they were educated through secondary school. Thereafter they had found professional jobs. All probably

died of AIDS. Opinion was divided initially about whether it was their father or their older sister, becoming successful with a small trading store, who had killed them. Divinations went both ways. When a fifth child died, a witchfinder named the older sister as the witch, and local opinion swung behind his finding, only to swing back against the father when she died shortly afterwards. His wife with her surviving children went to her kin, convinced that he was the killer.

In Lusitu, in Gwembe North, the illness of an up-and-coming but junior man in his late thirties initiated days of prolonged negotiations, involving many people, that led to the summoning of a witchfinder/cleanser. I paraphrase the case as recorded in several diaries. The first divination attributed the young man's illness to a senior man of his lineage who wanted him to die so there would be no doubt of his own position in the lineage. The junior man called a lineage meeting, and each man in turn denied that he had medicines for witchcraft. The consensus was that the senior man was the likely witch, as the divination had found, because he was poor, had no stock of his own, and was known to resent the fact that it was the junior man who slaughtered stock, contributed money at lineage funerals, and was the one others consulted. Unwillingly, the senior man agreed to accompany a lineage representative to consult a second diviner. Instead he went to the village headman and asked that other village elders be summoned to hear what was being forced on him, but lost their possible support when he failed to show up for the hearing. Three days later, he was taken to consult a diviner who found that he "had trapped" the junior man by using "herbs that cause death because he was envious and expected their kin to turn to him when the junior man was dead." This divination, however, also found that he was working together with his paternal half-brother, the father of the junior man, who had long been thought to be bewitching his children. The diviner impounded the senior man until his half-brother could be brought for testing. At this point, a lineage brother came to the rescue, siding with the senior man against the generation of their sisters' sons, and brought him home. The junior man then summoned all local members of their clan and got approval to summon a witchfinder to cleanse the senior man. He agreed to pay the witchfinder's fee himself,

for it was well known that the senior man had no stock. They also sent a complaint to the chief against those opposing their decision.

The chief approved summoning the witchfinder, saying "I do not want to see or hear that my people, especially the young ones, are killed by evil people." Some days later, the witchfinder arrived and announced that he would deal first with the senior man and then his half-brother. While a large crowd watched, his assistants searched the house and granary and produced a large frog which they said had been in the granary. The witchfinder examined it and said the frog assisted its owner to enter people's houses while they slept. During the search of the half-brother's homestead, they found "a magic snake and a horse". The snake was said to be an *idomba* used to bite and kill those who angered its owner. The horse transported him to a distance, but could also turn into a person to frighten his victims. Such displays are standard element in the drama associated with witch cleansing, as were the cuts made in each man's head for the insertion of "medicines" and the instruction that the men were not to wash their bodies for three days and were never again to "touch any herbs that can kill people." If they did, they would die.

A diary comments:

Many people who came to watch were surprised and happy to see how Doctor... performed his duties when he removes the witch's magic weapons. They think he knows his job. He can tell the history of anyone who asks him to do so, even giving names or years when something happened.

Satisfaction was such that another man consulted him on his sister's illness associated with her dreaming of her father coming to scold her. The witchfinder agreed to go to the father's house and remove his witchcraft medicines. The father responded by threatening his son with an axe and was restrained by onlookers. With his children united against him and help enlisted from the village headman, the father finally agreed to the search and to be treated. The witchfinder's assistants produced two medicine horns. One, fitted with a head lamp to enable him to see the road, was used to transport him to distant places; the second was to injure or kill. He was treated in the same

fashion as the first two men. Others then asked the witchfinder to deal with those they suspected.

Throughout Gwembe Valley, on the Plateau and elsewhere in Zambia, witchfinding is now endemic. Yamba (1997) associates this with the fear of AIDS, but by 1982 almost every Gwembe neighbourhood had summoned a witchfinder to deal with its witches while AIDS did not register as a threat until the latter half of the 1980s. After 1982, witchfinding continued to be common, though it may have peaked again between 1995 and 2000 when witchfinders claimed to be licensed to discover and cleanse witches, police refused to support those who objected to their presence or to act unless suspected witches were subject to physical violence, and the whole procedure had become bureaucratized. Those fearful of witchcraft obtained divinations with which they went to the headman. The headman, or a group of headmen, summoned the witchfinder by letter. He in turn asked the headman to inform the chief of the request by letter. The chief then wrote to the witchfinder saying that the people of such and such village needed him, and to the headman saying that he was sending the witchfinder and the people of the village should take care of him. The seeking out and exposure of witches was a highly formalized drama featuring a contestation with the discovered witchcraft objects. It was carried out before a crowd of onlookers who came to enjoy the drama and enjoy the humiliation of "the witch". They were encouraged to mock those accused who were forced to use a set formula in agreeing that the witchfinder spoke the truth, and then, dressed in leaves, made to dance before the jeering crowd. Before their medicines were destroyed and they were cleansed and pronounced free of witchcraft, the witchfinder demanded payment of a fee. Although some chiefs tried to set a limit to what could be asked, the usual fee was four cattle. In some instances it rose as high as nine cattle, or other property was taken in lieu of cattle – sewing machines, bicycles, ploughs and other agricultural equipment, or money. Before leaving the area, the witchfinder rewarded the chief for his patronage, though the amount given is said to vary.

Witchfinding and cleansing among the Tonga is, therefore, a ritual of humiliation, during which some members of the community become scapegoats of the collective malaise. The witch is first publicly

proclaimed and then made to do public penance before being deprived of power and made innocuous. This is quite unlike the relatively benign cleansing rituals reported from Tanzania (Green 2003:120ff) and Malawi (Soko 2002) which allow the suspected witch to be accepted back into the community without public humiliation. Unfortunately, the rituals of witchfinding do not appear to reduce fear of witchcraft. Instead witchfinders produce ever more lurid testimony to the powers of witches, while explanations are elaborated on why exposed witches continue to practice. While some of those treated by witchfinders in the 1980s and 1990s were said to have given up all dealings in witchcraft, others continued to be suspected. In the late 1990s, one of the most feared and hated witches in Lusitu had been cleansed in 1981. There are always ways to explain this: the witch bribed the witchfinder to be able to continue to operate, or perhaps the witchfinder had been a charlatan. Being declared innocent of witchcraft did not necessarily end suspicion. Some of those proclaimed innocent in the 1980s were later said to have bribed the witchfinder. Meantime, new suspects emerged as younger people matured and a new senior generation was seen as standing in the way of the young or living from their energy, and in deadly competition with one another.

As witchfinding is increasingly turned to as a resource against the evils attributed to witchcraft, the reservoir of possible witches increases and so does their supposed power. Witchfinders hold their audiences in part by producing evidence of new more dramatic vehicles of witchcraft power. These are drawn from the pool of images created in the multiethnic communities of the cities, where Zambians from all provinces mingle and also learn the witchcraft lore of immigrants from Southern and Central Africa, from Uganda, Somalia and West Africa as well as rumours of Satanic cults stemming from Europe, Asia and America. What they learn reinforces local fears, links witches to the power of Satan, and provides variety to the tales and dramas that give renewed assurance that witchcraft thrives and is responsible for whatever it is that one suffers.

CHAPTER X

**CHRISTIANITY AND
THE ANCESTORS**

Field Notes, Musulumba Village, June 1996

R's mother was here today [in homestead where I was then living], helping her daughter. While she rested she began to talk at great length. I could not follow what she was saying beyond the fact that she wanted to make beer for an offering and was complaining that her daughters refuse to help her. She said this year she had plenty of food and she ought to make offerings, but her children are Christians and do not want to come to the offering. After she left, I asked R about this and she said her mother wanted to make beer for an offering to her father and mother and to R's older sister who died of cholera in 1981. R and her surviving sister are Christians and do not want to take part in offerings or to have their children present for offerings.

The Pivotal Position of Belief

Once, as pointed out much earlier in this book, people were not concerned about what others believed: the important thing was what they did. In the last several decades of the twentieth century, more and more stress, especially among young people, began to be placed upon belief as the essential element in religion. Two common questions put to me in recent years have been: to what church do you belong and what do you believe? The last question probably derives from the teaching of Christian churches, especially some of the newer denominations that expect their adherents "to testify". I am told that pentecostal services emphasize the need to "believe" and give assurance that if one believes strongly enough in Jesus the reward will be happiness and prosperity in the here and now. Rewards for belief need not be postponed until heaven. Difficulties in this life are evidence that belief is weak and one must try harder. Attending church services indicates a willingness to believe, but one must then work for absolute belief and trust. These can be demonstrated by giving of what one has to the church.

The possibility of crafting your own life by concentrating on the will to believe should appeal to the individualism so much prized by Tonga men and women, but it also resonates with other Zambians. This may be because it makes the challenges faced by most present-day Zambians seem more manageable, whatever province they come from or whether they be urban or rural. For many, each day is a struggle to

find food for oneself and dependents and the strength to deal both with one's own and others' illnesses and the increasing prevalence of death. The psychological effort required for fervent belief involves much the same mobilization of will needed to brace oneself to face each day, and above all else it gives hope that life will be better.

While this probably attracts people of all ages given the difficulties of life in Zambia, in Gwembe Valley, at least, the most fervent champions of pentecostalism and other forms of fundamentalism during the 1980s and 1990s were likely to be young men and women in their twenties and thirties. An emphasis on belief may have special appeal for them. If the good things in life depend primarily upon an ability to believe, this empowers the young who otherwise are disadvantaged by a lack of capital, including the social capital obtained by training for the kind of jobs that underwrites better material conditions and through contacts that make for preference in employment. To believe that God will help one to acquire wealth and happiness requires no special skills or knowledge, no accumulation of material or mental capital. Purportedly, it is also under one's own control or dependent upon the individual's own relationship with God. In a time when young men and women have fewer opportunities than their elders once had and frequently have reason to feel exploited by their elders, a religion that emphasizes the freedom of the individual to achieve his or her own future has obvious attractions. If it also calls for a close study of the written word, as set forth in the Bible and religious tracts, this privileges those with some schooling over parents and other elders who matured before Zambian independence and the spread of schools. In the 1990s, Ulrich Luig found young men and women in Gwembe South looking "first and foremost at the Bible as the ultimate source of truth both in a practical and in an intellectual sense. For the Tonga, a 'real Christian' is not only someone who acts according to publicly acknowledged (Christian) standards but 'who understands' the Bible too" (1996:257).

The emphasis on the book and the word is unsurprising, given that religion has been part of the curriculum of the primary schools from their mission beginnings to the present, although since the 1970s the official syllabus has called for its teaching to be non-denominational. People who have gone to school are accustomed to being tested on

their ability to verbalize what they have been taught, and very often this is knowledge of the Bible (Luig 1996:235; Simuchimba 2004). Religion has become a testable subject, and high marks go to the one who has the ability to give back verbally what has been learned. Those unable to do this are categorized as ignorant. The enthusiasm with which young people have turned to new denominations, or denominations newly arrived in their vicinity, which recognize their school learned skills and their willingness to believe, signals their desire to control their own lives without having to defer to the control of parents or other kin, and perhaps also their fear that they will not be able to realize their own goals. Among the Gwembe male adolescents Hofer interviewed in 1997, both in Lusaka and in Gwembe Valley, confidence in their ability to achieve their goals was both low and varied inversely with age (2000). Acceptance of the challenge of belief is then a manifestation of hope and a manifestation of what has been called "the desire to transcend oneself."

Choosing a Church

In Southern Province, the reasons why people join one church rather than another is anything but clear. It may be due to peer pressure and the enthusiasm of the moment as young people try on different roles available to them. During the thirteen days of a Seventh Day Adventist Camp Meeting in Chezia neighbourhood in Gwembe Central, according to Shadreck Siajebo's 1997 diary, seventy eight people asked for baptism, the majority of them being young women and boys. Older people, he reported "said their children were not really Christians but were just being baptised because their friends were also being baptised. They said they knew nothing of what it meant to be a Christian." The older people of 1997 had seen other periods of enthusiastic embrace of a church, some had themselves participated in such enthusiasms, and they knew that enthusiasm could quickly dissipate when it became routinized, or pressures changed and other interests began to dominate (Colson 1970).

For some, joining a church may be unproblematic if their parents are Christians and there is only one denomination active in their vicinity. The latter is now rarely the case. The early colonial administration tried to prevent competition among missions by assigning them areas

within which they were to create schools and proselytize, but such restrictions broke down long before the end of the colonial period. In the late twentieth century, any neighbourhood usually had churches of several different denominations. In a neighbourhood in Mwansa Chieftaincy on the Plateau, there was a choice of Baptist, Seventh Day Adventist, Pentecostals and Paradise Church, and people moved from one to another. In Gwembe Valley, a comparable proliferation of sects competed for members. Musulumba people in Gwembe North could choose among Roman Catholic, Salvation Army, Seventh Day Adventist, Baptist, First Apostolic, New Apostolic and Pentecostal. In Chezia, in Gwembe Central, the choice was among Pilgrim Holiness (now Pilgrim Wesleyan), Seventh Day Adventist, Roman Catholic, First Apostolic and Zion. At Siameja, in Gwembe South, it was among Church of Christ, Roman Catholic, Seventh Day Adventist, First Apostolic, New Apostolic and Pentecostal.

Some people may unquestioningly join the church to which their parents and grandparents belonged, others look elsewhere. I think Ulrich Luig (1996:238) is right when he says that in Gwembe Valley, "Church membership is generally regarded as an entirely personal affair." While people may be under pressure to fulfil their religious obligations to kin whatever church they join, he encountered no instances where someone was in difficulties with kin either for turning Christian or for joining a particular church. This conforms to my own experience on the Plateau and in Gwembe Valley, though I know of one instance where a man quarreled with and expelled his step-son from the homestead when the latter refused to join him in becoming a Seventh Day Adventist. In general, people do as they wish about joining a church so long as it does not jeopardize others.

In the latter decades of the twentieth century, the older established Zambian churches, Roman Catholic and Protestant alike, lost members to more fundamentalist or charismatic churches, including recently founded local churches. Churches that stress general participation and show their willingness to engage with the immediate difficulties of their members, which include fear of the anger of *mizimo* and of witchcraft and the experience of possession, have been particularly attractive (Luig 1996:245). So has the Seventh Day Adventist Church, with its taboos and the authority it derives from the fact that it is set

apart by the observation of the Sabbath on the day authorized by the Bible.

But few seem interested in articulating the special features that drew them to a church. When I tried to explore the differences among churches with the leader of one of the apostolic churches in Siameja, he said that in the Catholic Church only one person prayed, whereas everyone prayed for themselves in the apostolic and pentecostal churches. Asked to explain the difference then between apostolic and pentecostal churches, he said that one used short prayers and hymns and the other used long ones. But he also said that Christians of all churches found comfort in their church and no longer feared the *mizimo* and did not go for divination. This is patently untrue, for a diary recorded various instances of Siameja Christians going for divinations and he admitted that a woman who considered herself a good Catholic also served as a diviner and on occasion was summoned from a church service to carry out a divination for someone. Many have said that no church is able to protect its members against witchcraft, nor, for that matter, does being a member in good standing protect one against the charge of being a witch.

Thus, whether people join one of the newer denominations or adhere to a longer established one, this still leaves open the question of just what it is that they hope to accomplish and whether this relates to concerns that once underlay Tonga religious life. Once people took part in more or less the same public rituals. Then it was possible to describe Tonga religious activity and questions could be asked about the meaning of different forms of ritual. This is no longer true. During the latter half of the twentieth century, people increasingly departed from engagement with rituals that spoke to any common experience. They began to worship in different ways publicly. At the same time religious life may also have come to be less a matter of public involvement and more a private engagement with divinity and thus less open to scrutiny and question.

Even those who speak out in apostolic and pentecostal gatherings, where public testimonies to conversion and belief are encouraged, rarely give voice to their own personal understanding of religious experience. Testimonials are highly standardized in content and style of utterance. Those I heard in Gwembe Valley in the 1990s were familiar

from testimonials I heard at pentecostal and apostolic meetings in the United States in early 1942. Public worship in other churches also is based on foreign models. Seventh Day Adventist services follow a pattern that originated in parent churches in the United States, and the lesson sheets studied in Sabbath classes come from the parent organization. Hymns sung there, and at services of the Pilgrim Holiness (now the Pilgrim Wesleyan) and Baptist churches, are borrowed from standard hymnals with words translated into ciTonga. Roman Catholic services do incorporate local music and other local practices, but the structure of a service is characteristic of the universal church. On the whole, many prefer this. The knowledge that they are worshipping as people do in Europe and America gives meaning to the service and provides a sense of belonging to an international community which many Zambians wish to emulate or exploit.

People also appreciate the fellowship to be found within a church, for those who participate together in the service are also expected to assist one another on other occasions, providing alternative support systems that become very important in times of trouble. In towns, they may be the only support system available. In the rural areas, this role may be less essential, but fellow church members are still expected to visit the ill and comfort the dying and to assist at funerals, and the church may raise funds to help those otherwise in need. For the young, church based activities enliven the routines of village life, giving them occasions and places to meet now that impromptu dances, curing sessions, and performances of neighbourhood drum teams are rare, and all are under the ban of many of the churches. The majority of older men and sometimes women have come to rely on the beer drink and the funeral for social life. For the young and for seniors who do not wish to drink and dislike the noise of the beer drink, church gatherings provide an alternative venue for sociability and the exchange of information. This may have little to do with religious belief, but it has much to do with the role played by churches in the late twentieth century.

Those who call themselves Christians and are adherents of a particular church do not necessarily mean by this that they expect to conform to all of its teachings. Probably this happens nowhere in the world, and everywhere people make choices about when and where to conform. All introduced churches ban plural marriages, but most

Gwembe men living in the rural areas, and some in urban areas, are likely to consider a number of wives desirable. Men who support a church may have a number of wives, and women who willingly marry as junior wives may call themselves Seventh Day Adventists, Roman Catholics or apostolics. All churches ban sexual adventures outside marriage, but many married men and women in Gwembe Valley and on the Plateau, even in these days when knowledge of HIV transmission is widespread, have what are called, using the English terms, "girl friends" and "boy friends". Among them are church members and church officers. All churches ban theft, but exposure of theft of funds from local organizations does not lead to expulsion from the church, nor necessarily to the loss of an office within the church, and the corruption of public officials who call themselves Christians is common gossip and a matter of public record. Seventh Day Adventists and various other churches ban the use of alcohol and tobacco. Some of their adherents observe this religiously. Others, including school boys, have a liking for both as well as for cannabis. Few, if any, observe Seventh Day Adventist strictures on eating meat. Most churches preach against the use of protective charms, but few, in rural areas at least, are prepared to face life without them (or the charms they hope will give advantage in pursuing their goals), and I have heard of Christians with overseas professional degrees who consult diviners and acquire protective medicines. Most churches preach against the reality of witchcraft, and have done so for almost a hundred years, but belief that witchcraft lies behind much that happens remains strong and witchfinders are patronized, including by some who have completed secondary school and university. Archbishop Milingo, in the 1970s, spoke to the concerns of a large number of Zambians, and the scandal of some, when he tried to bring witchcraft and the phenomenon of possession within the purview of the Catholic Church, arguing that witches "are human beings who have sold their souls to the Devil" and possession is due to the entry of "fallen angels" or the spirits of those "who have died unreconciled with God and man" (Ter Haar 1992:144, 145).

Behavior, therefore, indicates that people think they have the right to select from doctrine whatever they regard as appropriate to themselves and reject the rest, but they make idiosyncratic selections.

People choose in terms of their individual dilemmas and appraisal of what is important, and this includes the pressures they are under from their fellows at particular times. If religion continues to speak to common concerns, this finds expression in the concern for healing, in which all have a stake, and in the apprehension of evil, vividly portrayed in the drama of the witch hunt, and among agriculturalists in the continued concern for rain. These are catered for by the diviner, the witchfinder, and the new forms of possession such as *mangelo* and *bungelengele*. Churches involve themselves with healing and prayers for the ill and dying, and on occasion organize prayers for rain, but this mobilizes only the individual congregation. A mobilization of all churches active in a rural neighbourhood in rituals to ensure the common good is non-existent or so rare that I have not encountered it. Instead, members may be expected to avoid meetings held at other churches as well as communal gatherings at land shrines, rituals that recognize the solidarity of kinship, and the curing dramas that combat possession. The funeral and the witchhunt are occasions of mass gathering that override denominational boundaries, but at funerals denominationalism may still override the common sorrow.

The churches through their official leaders engage in discussion of public policies that affect everyone, but I have no evidence that in their prayers people express concern with the overarching political and economic orders that now impinge upon them in so many ways, other than perhaps by asking for “good government” and to live at peace with their neighbours. If they ask for “a good life”, this, for many, is a life in which one enjoys health and the luxuries now associated with the Zambian elite and the international scene: good clothes, good food, and an abundance of material possessions, rather than anything associated with life guaranteed by the experience of their own fore-runners. Christianity, at the end of the twentieth century as it was at the beginning, is more likely to be interpreted as living according to standards associated with Europe and increasingly the United States and so to be part of a modern world (see Simpson 2002).

Modernity and Christianity

At the end of the century, churches are associated with modernity as they were early in the twentieth century when people saw mission

teaching and patronage as providing a means to achieve the kinds of power exercised by the Europeans who then dominated political and economic life. But modernity is always a matter of the moment. Other things being equal, the newer the more modern and therefore the better. This can apply to churches as well as other phenomena. Newly arrived churches appeal because they are new as well as for what else they can offer. But at the beginning of the twenty-first century, newly arrived churches are preaching to those who have heard these messages before. Their basic message is anything but new to Zambians who have heard Christianity preached for a hundred years and more.

Churches founded early in the century by missions, whose schools trained those who fought for Zambian independence, are disadvantaged because they are established and their record known. In mid-century they were tarnished by their association with colonialism. More recently they may be tarnished by the perception that those they trained, who won independence, failed to fulfill the promises of the independence period and instead were corrupted by their own access to power. While the established churches continue to be powerful at the national level, since the 1970s, charismatic and/or fundamentalist churches, which were not favoured by the colonial administration, have gained much influence. Their rise is signified by the fact that while the first president of Zambia was a Presbyterian, the second considered himself a charismatic, and the third underwent rebaptism as a Baptist in 2005. He had first joined the Baptist Church while in school, only to become a Roman Catholic, then during his early political career he joined the Anglican Church, after which, temporarily disgusted with politics, he became a member of Watchtower (Jehovah's Witnesses). During his early years in office, his vice-president was a charismatic minister. The majority of Zambia's leaders over the past fifty years have considered themselves to be Christians, and so represented themselves, although they may have spoken against foreign intervention in Zambian affairs. In turn the churches supported the Zambian government. Their mutual interdependence was demonstrated, in the 1960s and 1970s, by "public ceremonies in which political and religious leaders partake side by side; the implementation of 'development'; the participation of religious leaders in governmental and party committees; and informal consultations between top-ranking political and religious

leaders" (van Binsbergen 1981:303). Since then, it has become standard practice throughout Zambia that political meetings, like all official occasions (including an Agricultural Field Day) be opened and closed with prayer, just as they are opened and closed with singing the national anthem.

Christianity as a Traditional Religion

Christianity, therefore, in some form is part of the Zambian mentality, whether received directly from mission teaching by those of older generations or filtered through the experience of one's own family and other elders. It is part of the "mental furniture", in Kate Crehan's terms, with which one constructs an interpretation of events. The religiosity of the 1990s and early twenty-first century is a product of at least a hundred years of contact with Christianity during which generation after generation of Zambians have questioned what they were taught by their elders, missions, and mission converts, and the multitudinous others whom they encountered while at work, and put this to the test of their own experience.

In Hofer's 1997 sample of adult Gwembe men, living in Lusaka or in the Valley, aged thirty nine to eighty seven, 60% claimed to belong to a Christian church. All must have had Christian contacts. Of the 181 male adolescents, aged twelve to twenty three, interviewed in Siameja, Sinazeze and Maamba, in Gwembe South, (60% of whom had previously lived in an urban area for at least a year), 92% said they belonged to a Christian church. What this means about belief and practice is another matter. While the majority of adult men in the sample, whether or not they claimed to belong to a church, said that they still followed some of the old Tonga rituals, only one sixth of the adolescents claimed to do so. The majority of the latter indicated that "they had lost their belief in the traditional rituals and ancestral rules of conduct" which they characterized as "out-of-date or even as primitive" (Hofer 2000:5.1.1; see also Ulrich Luig 1996:237).

But earlier generations of Gwembe youth have said the same thing and then, as they matured and acquired responsibilities, turned to participating in appeals to the *mizimo* and themselves become *mizimo* inheritors or found themselves possessed by *basangu* or other manifestations such as *mangelo* or *bungelengele* which arrived in the

1960s and 1970s. The elders of the beginning of the twenty-first century, whether or not they declare themselves Christians, have had their encounters with Christianity. At the end of the twentieth century, it may also be that many youths see Christian teachings as included in “the traditional rituals and ancestral rules of conduct”, for Christianity in various forms is now the traditional religion of many Zambians. Hofer also found that the rebellion against tradition of Gwembe adolescents “is primarily directed against the (religious) rituals and customs of the ethnic group they consider obsolete”. In contrast, social structures and social rules which regulate the behavior of individuals or living together with others in the community were barely questioned (2000:5.4)

A Hundred Years of Change:

Early in the twentieth century, the missions arrived in Tonga country together with the colonial state. In the next several decades many young people, especially on the Plateau, turned to Christianity as they emancipated themselves from controls enforced by their elders as representatives of the *mizimo* and the *basangu* associated with land shrines. They found it reasonable to question the reliance of their parents and grandparents on rituals which no longer spoke to their own aspirations. They were adopting what they called “the ways of the Europeans” and “the ways of the town”, and they hoped to prosper through commercial agriculture or permanent employment. For some at least this meant acceptance of Christianity as taught by one of the many missions that existed within the Tonga-speaking area during the first half of the twentieth century, or one of the churches encountered while at work elsewhere in Southern Africa. Brendan Carmody, who has carried out intensive research within Southern Province, has suggested that people accepted Christianity, not because it provided a more comprehensive or persuasive explanation of the world than did the old rituals and their associated explanations, but because the missions were associated with employment and education and so provided entry into the modern world (2001:87). He is undoubtedly right, that this is what attracted many people to the missions. In the 1940s, I heard people evaluate different missions by how well they taught English and other European skills rather than in terms of doctrine.

But, they also thought that the Europeans had found some kind of tool that made for what they regarded as a better way of life. Christianity was part of European technology and so well might provide a more comprehensive and persuasive explanation of the way the world operates. Those who could read searched the Bible for the crucial formulas that led to empowerment. Carmody also suggests that those who converted then, and also at later periods, did so because they saw this as a means of adopting European fashions, encouraged by the fact that the teaching emphasized “the acceptance of foreign ways rather than emotional and critical assimilation” of religious thought. That, too often, what was learned remained “like an overcoat, hardly touching the underlying reality of the Zambian personality especially in issues connected with witchcraft” (1999:89,90).

In the 1940s, the progressive farmers of Southern Province, who were the role models of many of its people, and the younger men (and a very few women) who held honoured positions as school teachers and extension workers, were for the most part those who had been to school. This meant that they had been exposed to mission teaching and many considered themselves to be Christians, whether or not they had been formally baptized or whether or not they were members in good standing in some church. Those who had taken second wives or otherwise broken the rules of their church usually still supported local congregations and sent their own children to the mission schools. In the 1950s and early 1960s, politically active Tonga, who fought against the colonial regime, were products of these schools.

The 1950s and 1960s also saw the beginning of the population movement that shifted a large portion of the Zambian population from the rural areas to the cities, though some intended to remain there only temporarily. This, in itself, put in question a religion centered on rural life. During the 1960s and early 1970s, when Zambian towns and cities flourished and jobs were numerous, many Tonga-speakers, whether or not they had spent much time in school, opted for town life. This meant, as they well knew, a way of life which would not be organized through neighbourhood shrines or offerings to *mizimo*, though in an emergency kin still living on the land could be asked to approach the *mizimo* for them. *Mizimo* were assumed to be able to follow their kin wherever they went, including to cities and even to foreign

countries, but it was categorically denied that it was possible to make an offering to them in town. At first this was based on the assumption that grain for the offering must come from one's own fields. Since one did not cultivate in town, ergo, one could not offer. At most, some said, one might have a divination and then go to the edge of the town, and at the base of a tree pour an offering of water while promising that a real offering would be made on return to the village. But, I think, offerings in town were also seen as inappropriate because towns and cities were considered places where the European way of life held sway. This continued to be true even after Zambian independence when the cities were claimed for the African majority. In the 1990s, when most offerings in the rural areas were made with beer brewed from purchased grain and meal, and a few had even begun to offer using *skokian* (a distilled drink made with meal, sugar and yeast) or *njungula* (a fermented drink made with meal, yeast and tea leaves), it was still agreed that an offering could not be made in town. Offering was firmly associated with the rural areas which continued to be defined as "home" by some but was a place of outmoded practices to others who identified completely with town life.

Meanwhile, in the rural areas until the mid-1960s, the influence of the missions, especially through their control of education, left many unwilling to be seen to participate in rituals that they were told were "heathen" and/or as characteristic of those ignorant of town sophistication and book knowledge. By the 1970s, some had come to think of such things as characteristic of the colonial past and so inappropriate to people living in the new Zambia. Common responses from young people in the 1970s to questions about rituals once common were "But this is Zambia", or "But that was colonialism".

From 1965 to 1975, during the period of euphoria associated with independence and the rapid improvement of living conditions for most people, Zambians had a confidence in their own ability to advance and were impatient of controls exercised from Europe or elsewhere. Many were prepared to question teaching stemming from missions dominated by expatriats, and wanted to build on some heritage of their own. Even so, modernity continued to be associated with Christianity, and the schools, though few remained under mission control, continued to teach religious studies. Despite the non-denominational emphasis

required by the syllabus, this continued to be slanted towards the presentation of Christianity (Simuchimba 2004:91). Even those who drew on their own vision or visions to create new religious movements considered themselves Christians and they drew upon what they knew of Christianity and the organization of Christian churches. (Dillon-Malone 1988, Kirsch 2003; Ute Luig 1998; Muntemba 1972; van Binsbergen 1981:262ff).

With the decline in self-confidence in the late 1970s, when Zambia suffered from a declining economy and its championing of independence movements elsewhere in Africa, there came a new desire for association, at least symbolically, with what were seen as the achievements of Europe and the Americas. In 1982 I found people in Gwembe pessimistic that African achievements could ever match European achievements and certain that all good things came from elsewhere. Since then, many channels (including television) advertise and glamorize Western life, which many see as coterminous with being civilized. Ngulube (1989) found urban Zambians in the late 1980s stigmatising the following of tradition while the majority of urban residents, especially the young, tended to glorify what they regarded as European and American ways of life. In the 1980s and 1990s, Simpson (2002) found adolescents at a secondary school in Central Province, some of whom came from Southern Province, very much of the same persuasion. Often the Western way of life is presented as linked to Christianity, and the boys in the secondary school studied by Simpson saw education as preparing them to become "Christian gentlemen." Those who live in rural areas share many of the same aspirations, and they resent being looked down upon by urban residents and the educated elite as backward countrymen and women.

The desirability of Christian forms also continues to be taught, implicitly or explicitly, by Western institutions associated with the new drive to subordinate Africa to the Western world. Although many of the early missions closed in the late 1960s or early 1970s, the Catholic Church actively created new missions during these years, including several in Gwembe Valley, while in the 1990s Baptist missionaries from the United States began determined efforts to convert members of existing congregations to their own fundamentalist Christianity. American and West African evangelists associated with

fundamentalist and/or charismatic churches regularly visit Zambian cities to host large gatherings and distribute material assistance, including fellowships for study overseas in “Christian universities”. A substantial number of the non-governmental international agencies, now so important throughout Zambia as dispensers of technical assistance, including support for schools and health services, are church based and provide financial assistance for the building of new churches or activities carried out under church auspices. World Vision, for one, is active within Southern Province, including the Gwembe Valley. Radio gospel services, newspapers, the format of political meetings, and the pronouncements of political leaders all proclaim the importance of Christianity and often the infallibility of the Bible. In 1991, Zambia was declared a Christian nation by President Chiluba when he was first installed in office, and that designation was entrenched within the Preamble of the Zambian Constitution when it was amended in 1996. (Simuchimba 2004: 113) This is said to have been at the instance of charismatic Christians who were intent on warding off the perceived threat of Islam as a proselytizing religion on the move. (Cheyeka 2004:133)

Whatever the reasons for the designation, it has had the effect of officially associating Zambia with Christianity, and implicitly now, for many, to be Zambian means to be Christian, and less certainly to be a member of some church. This includes the elders of the end of the twentieth century who are products of almost forty years of indoctrination with pride in being Zambian, while being Zambian is a basic element in the identity of all who have grown up since independence.

Religion as an Existential Experiment

At the beginning of the 1960s, few people in the rural areas, with the exception of school teachers and extension workers, had gone beyond lower primary school, for those with more education left to find employment in the towns. By the 1990s, men and women with some secondary education were to be found in every village and many other residents had completed primary school. There was frequent movement back and forth between town and country, in a search for jobs, to ask assistance of kin, to attend funerals, to find treatment in hospitals or from African doctors specializing in herbal medicines or

other forms of treatment, and to escape from local embroilments. This has been characteristic of Zambian life since the 1950s. Those past early childhood have been exposed to the teaching of a number of different churches, either through attending services or listening to those prepared to propound on the role of the church.

In Gwembe Valley, probably everyone has also had some exposure to rituals associated with offerings to the *mizimo* and less certainly to appeals to *basangu* or to consultation with *basangu* mediums, for these continued to occur through the 1990s. All, adults and adolescents alike, have probably seen the public exposure and treatment of local witches by a visiting witchfinder and heard discussions of the bases of their power. On the Plateau, even in the 1940s I knew villages where offerings had not been poured for some years. There, probably many grow up without exposure to rituals associated with *mizimo* and *basangu*, although *malende* shrines are visited to appeal for rain and new ones have come into existence in the 1990s. *Mangelo* shrines built in Plateau homesteads since the late 1960s attest to a continued experience of possession. Few may have participated in rituals at such sites, but many must have seen witchfinding sessions and may themselves have summoned witchfinders or been accused of being witches.

The result is that at any one time there is tremendous variation in what people conceive of as possible and what they do about this. Nor is any particular conclusion necessarily seen as final. For many, religious activity is subject to empirical tests in much the same way as they experiment with new agricultural techniques or other innovations. As some say, "I am just trying this". If it works, they continue. If they continue to suffer or otherwise feel alienated, they are prepared to try something else, including possibilities that had been previously discarded. Religious life within any locality, therefore, and for each individual, tends to be a blend of religious practices, subject to inventive selection as people cope with very real existential problems in a world that offers a continuous parade of challenges that somehow have to be met. I think the majority no longer consider *basangu* as important – either they do not exist or they have no power, including over local weather now that radios report weather patterns for Southern Africa. I may, however, be minimizing the importance of the new possession cults such as *mangelo* and *bungelengele* which continue to attract

followings. Many do think the *mizimo* continue to affect their kin, but for some this is in the role of evil spirits. Many have tried to find an alternative power that may help them in this life in *Leza*, reinterpreted as the Christian God. Some are sceptical that help lies there. A great many continue to believe in the power of charms, to provide protection and assist one in life, and that these charms can be used for witchcraft. The proliferation and greater prominence of Christian churches in the last decades of the twentieth century were matched by the proliferation of those who traffic in charms and the detection of witches.

Those who deal with one another in daily life are likely to disagree on some or all of such matters, and therefore about what should be done when people face situations in which they feel a need to find support in some form of power deemed external to themselves.

The Social Context of Practice

In 1972, I carried out censuses in three Gwembe villages during which I asked resident adults if he or she had made an offering to the *mizimo* during the previous year. Most of those over thirty had done so. But the question was taken as an insult by a woman school teacher who came from the Plateau. She saw herself as an educated woman and a third generation Christian whose parents had never made an offering, and it was offensive that anyone might think she participated in what she regarded as heathen, uncivilized practices. I think many of her generation from the Plateau would have been equally offended, although some would have been amused at a question about matters so outside their own experience. In the 1990s many people, whether they were from the Plateau or Gwembe Valley, had never participated in such rituals, nor did members of their families or lineages expect them to do so. Still, they might fear witchcraft and on occasion turn to diviners to discover who the witch might be or to find ways of counteracting the witch's power.

Elsewhere, at least in rural areas, people had to cope with expectations from others who wanted divinations pursued, offerings made to ancestors, and sometimes appeals made at the old land shrines or places of power, as well as from those who wanted to convert them or hold them to the teachings of some church. Some who regarded themselves as Christians or even simply as non-believers in the reality of

the spirits, refused to participate in offerings or communal gatherings at land shrines even under considerable pressure to conform. Others regarded participation as a small price to pay for being on good terms with their associates. Others gave way because they could not resist the pressures exerted upon them by those who argued that failure to comply put them and theirs in danger. Still others, who in some contexts thought that such appeals might be successful, refused to participate for fear of what others would say. There were also those who thought the dead continued to care about their living kin and made offerings regularly to ensure their continued good standing with the dead. And then there were fervid believers who, for the moment at least, had staked their lives and their reputation on conforming to the mandates of some church, at least with respect to avoiding “heathen” practices. Thus, if people did not make offerings or attend communal rituals, this was for various reasons, just as they had various reasons for attending or not attending a church.

Exemplars of Diversity

I have chosen a few exemplars to illustrate diversity. As elsewhere in the world, religion in practice turns out to be a medley of ideas and practices, incorporating at any one moment considerations that may be seen as less important on other occasions or that have little or no resonance with others living in the same area or the same homestead.

The first exemplar is a Plateau man who died in 1985 in his late 80s. He had been a prosperous progressive farmer and a man highly respected for his integrity. In the 1940s, he was also seen as living like a European in a large burned-brick house with a dug well. In the almost forty years I knew him, he never attended any church, despite having spent a short time in his youth at both Jesuit and Mennonite missions and having served as headman of a village populated largely by Seventh Day Adventists. He never tried to expound to me what he did believe in, but he was firm that he did not believe in *mizimo* or *basangu*, or for that matter, in the reality of witchcraft or the credibility of divination. He had nothing to do with offerings or appeals for rain. They were useless, he said. At his funeral, some of his lineage kin demanded that his widow go through the ritual purification so that an inheritor of his *muzimo* could be anointed and, thereafter, she make

beer for the return of the spirit. She refused, saying that her husband had not allowed beer in his homestead during his lifetime and had never made an offering, and she would not go against his wishes. His funeral ended without the inheritance of the *muzimo*. Nevertheless, ten years later, in a village a hundred miles away, I found a man of his lineage making an offering to his *muzimo* after a divination found that the *muzimo*, angered by a lack of offerings, was causing his illness.

Among the sceptics who said they did not believe that the dead were able to continue to affect the living but nevertheless conformed by consulting diviners and pouring offerings, was a highly intelligent Gwembe man born in 1918. In the early 1960s he was not a member of any church, though as a boy he had gone briefly to a school administered by the Seventh Day Adventist Mission. He held that *mizimo* and *basangu* either did not exist or had no power. Nevertheless, he consulted diviners and made offerings. He justified going along by saying, "Of course I went for a divination. Do you suppose I want my wife's relatives to say that I am neglecting her and the children?" The divination fee and the grain used in brewing for the offering were little enough if in return he maintained good relations with his affines and his wife. Years later, in 1983, as one of the most prosperous men in the village, he became a regular attendant at the newly founded local Seventh Day Adventist Church, and when he died in 2001 his widow refused to be purified or to have him buried in the old way. His funeral was carried out by members of his church. Nevertheless, in 1996, he was one of the elders who arranged for rebuilding a *kaanda* shrine at the grave of a *basangu* medium, and he joined there with others in an appeal for rain. I can only think that again he had decided that this was a small price to pay for being on good terms with other elders, some of whom had accused him of witchcraft in 1982.

Others could happily combine church membership with participation in rituals addressing *basangu* and *mizimo*. In 1996, a Gwembe elder (born in 1917), proud of his *muzimo*-given skill of making *nyeli* flutes and his position as senior *mizimo* inheritor of his lineage, informed me that he was now a Roman Catholic and was custodian of the drums belonging to that church as well as of the *nyeli* flutes belonging to the neighbourhood. When I asked if this meant he no longer offered to the *mizimo*, he said that of course he still poured offerings: "If someone is

ill, you send for a diviner and find out what the *mizimo* want, and then you make the offering". That year, and again in 1998, I was present when he officiated at offerings in the houses of some of his ritual dependents. He saw no clash between being a Roman Catholic and being a practising adherent of the *mizimo*. Nor apparently did the man who led one of the Siameja churches for some ten years, during which time he also hosted several large *mangelo* healing sessions, consulted diviners about being bewitched, and held offerings to the ancestors.

Mujibelo, a Musulumba man born in 1957, was also prepared to use all resources available to him when he was dying in 1999:

Diary, July 1999, Musulumba).

Today was the funeral in our village of Mujibelo who died in Siavonga District Hospital. He started to be ill on July 17, 1999. On that day he called his father so that they could see each other and say goodbye because he saw that his death was coming and he wanted to say goodbye to his father. Second he called for his sisters who live at a distance so that his father could find a way for them to come. Third, Mujibelo wanted his older sister to make an offering to the *mizimo* because she has the *muzimo* of their grandmother who bore their mother. Four, Mujibelo wanted to be taken to the church to receive the sacrament. But there was no one in this parish who could anoint the ill because the missionary has gone to Brazil. So the Sisters (from the Mission) took him to Siavonga to the priest there who gave him the sacrament of the ill and Mujibelo slept at the hospital for one day. At dawn he died. In the late afternoon the Sisters went to bring him to his grave. They wanted the funeral to be a Christian funeral, but the senior men of his lineage refused to have this kind of funeral saying that Mujibelo was the guardian of three *mizimo* and how would these *mizimo* be able to leave him if he were mourned in the Christian fashion. An elder drove away the Christians and the Sisters were very angry because of the refusal to mourn him on the path of *Leza*.
(Christopher Nkiwani)

The following day, according to Benard Simalabali's diary, Mujibelo's kin had second thoughts and asked the Mission and local

parishioners to carry out a Christian funeral, but this was refused:

The Church people help a lot when someone dies as a Christian. They buy food for the funeral. The priest helps. They can mourn for three days singing from dawn and there is food for everyone at the funeral. Now this lineage is going to suffer a lot because they have very little.

Some who are involved with both church and *mizimo* show greater ambivalence. In 1996, five Chezia women, ranging in age from early twenties to mid-fifty, all of whom attended the Seventh Day Adventist Church, cross-examined me about my church membership and my beliefs. I asked the most vocal, who often sang Catholic hymns which she regarded as more pleasing than the hymns in her own church, why she had joined the Seventh Day Adventists since her parents had been baptised as Pilgrim Holiness. She replied, "Because the Bible says you should honour the Sabbath." Then she and the others said that whether or not I believed in *mizimo* and ghosts (*zelo*) and witchcraft as realities, they had to contend with such things even though they themselves did not make offerings. Several days later the oldest of the women asked for a ride to a village some thirty miles away where she could have an offering made for her by the inheritor of the *muzimo* of her father's mother. She had visited a diviner to find the cause of an unhealed sore of some years' standing and had learned that this *muzimo* wanted an offering, but that the sore was also due to witchcraft: someone had placed *ciposo* (witch medicine) on the path at her field camp, and when she sat at the fire, the smoke hit her and made her ill. Because the *muzimo* was angry, it failed to protect her.

Then there are those who seem to be perpetual seekers, for whom religious life appears to be a quest that can last a lifetime as they test what is offered by different churches and within Tonga tradition. Some seem never to find a spiritual abiding place. Among those prepared to experiment and move on, always in search of something better, was a Central Gwembe man who was born in 1940, whom I first knew as a youngster in 1956 when he was still in lower primary school. Timothy had a gift for teaching by examples, for some of which he drew on Bible lessons learned at school. Thus, he invoked the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden to labour among the thistles in commenting on a hand swollen from cultivating among nettles, and

the story of Noah in discussing the projected flooding of their area by Kariba Dam. He said he and other school children did not attend offerings to *mizimo* or the rituals held at *malende* shrines since, as he said with fine scorn, "the dead are dead." In 1962, recently married, he was equally scornful of things he associated with the past and with "the ignorant old men and women who had never been to school", and said that he and his close friends would never offer to *mizimo*. At his request I took him to the Pilgrim Holiness Mission at Chabbuboma for baptism. When I asked why he wanted to be baptized, he said it was because his heart so desired – a common response when someone is asked why he or she has done something – and that many other young men were also considering baptism. He denied that he was motivated by any belief that baptism would safeguard him against witches: for that he would need protective medicines. Within six months, he began to talk of the possibility that the *muzimo* of his mother's brother might be transferred to him from its present inheritor, and looked forward to the prospect with some enthusiasm, giving cogent reasons why he was a more suitable candidate than his older brother or another older man of his lineage. The same year he married a second wife. By 1972, he was a *muzimo* inheritor. In the intervening years while working on the Plateau, he had joined the Church of the Brethren because, he said, he enjoyed going to the service and he thought he might as well try it out. He had also acquired various medicines, including protective medicines given him by a mother's brother, was making offerings to the *mizimo*, and had taken a third wife. By 1982 he was attending the Seventh Day Adventist gathering, recently initiated by one of the school teachers from the Plateau, to which many of the younger people were flocking. He considered becoming a member but had second thoughts since he had three wives and had no intention of giving up any of them or of giving up beer. He thought he might join the Catholic Church instead. This now had a few members in the next village who met together. He knew the Catholic Church objected to plural wives, but he thought it would not reject him for polygyny and it would not ask him to give up beer. Otherwise he thought one church might be as good as another, and he liked the thought of being a member of a church. Yet he never attended the Pilgrim Holiness Church still active in the village, whose members were trying to build their own meeting place now that they

were forbidden to use a school room. In 1982 he hosted a major *masabe* curing ceremony for his sister and participated in the building of a shrine for a *mangelo/basangu* who called people to join him there in an appeal for rain. By 1992 he had inherited additional *mizimo*, acquired a young new wife, and was thinking of joining a Zionist church which had been started in the next village. Six years later, when a witchfinder was brought in to cleanse the witches of his village, he was found with an *idomba* snake and another witch device and had to pay to be cleansed. On that subject he was very reticent, though he had some very unkind things to say about witchfinders as cheats who falsely accused people to make money; at the same time he was adamant that other neighbourhood men who had been “caught” as witches were using witchcraft to kill their children.

Moving in and out of churches while conforming to none and continuing to propitiate ancestors and other spirits is fairly typical of the men and women of Timothy’s generation, although some of his contemporaries neither joined a church nor showed any concern with Christian teaching. Others, including those who have been installed as *mizimo* inheritors, once they have joined a church adamantly refuse to carry out duties for which they once accepted responsibility. One such was a Musulumba woman, born in 1920, who died in 1996. The death divination, solicited by her kin, found the *mizimo* angered because she had not made an offering since the death of her husband in 1976 even though she was a *mizimo* inheritor. Benard Simalabali commented, “The old woman believed in the Church. She was a Roman Catholic. These days people trust in the Body of the Church. God is there, truly.”

Pressures to Conform

Some shift back and forth according to the circumstances with which they are faced. Many who previously had ignored both *mizimo* and *basangu* were said to be having second thoughts as the onslaught of the AIDS epidemic led people to wonder what had gone wrong. Any recourse to divination for explanation placed responsibility for misfortune on neglect of the ancestors and the spirits of the land or on witchcraft. Diviners do not attribute AIDS, or any other illness, to failure to participate in Christian rituals or to live according to Christian rules. This is not one of the possibilities people entertain when they

consult a diviner. In 1996, during a discussion dealing with the *cibalo* field on which agricultural ritual should be initiated, a Siameja man born in 1946 said they had not had such a field since resettlement in 1958, but were planning to create one again. He added,

The young people just wanted to do things on their own, but then they had all these deaths and when they go for divination they find that it is because they have given up the old ways and so they are starting to try and begin again.

Young people, who have little ritual responsibility until they are married and have children or have become *mizimo* inheritors, are free to do as they like about such matters. As they mature, and especially if they are interested in the inheritance of lineage property (including rights over the children of the men of the lineage), they become more conflicted. If they have an obligation to officiate at offerings for others and refuse to do so, they may be blamed for subsequent problems. Another instance reflects the dilemmas they face.

Diary, March 1993, Musulumba Village

What killed the woman was the *muzimo* of the grandmother who bore her mother. Her mother has the *muzimo* but has not offered to it because she entered the Church. So the *mizimo* [of the lineage] are very angry and are killing their grandchildren and their children. Her brother is very angry with his sister because she has not made offerings to these *mizimo*. He arrived yesterday with three children of the dead woman. His sister said nothing because they have seen that she neglected to make offerings. Many people say the *mizimo* should be taken from her, but her brother refuses to have the *mizimo* given to someone else because they go with rights to cattle and he does not want the cattle to go elsewhere.

(Benard Simalabali)

In this case, some of the pressures were exerted by the Catholic Mission, which had provided much assistance to the people of the area since 1963 and especially to converts in good standing. The

Mission supplied old men and women with blankets, clothing and food in hunger years, dispensed medication when the local health centre had no medicines, provided transport to the hospital some twenty miles away, brought home the bodies of the dead, and contributed food for the funeral gathering. It also sponsored the local soccer team and provided it with soccer balls and uniforms, and organized a young people's group to build houses for the old and disabled.

Other pressures came from the desire to be seen as modern, and the rituals associated with earlier Tonga life were not associated with modernity. In 1996, Simalabali commented that few in Musulumba now made offerings. "Long ago, many offered, but now we are people of Zambia. The old men who did *kupila* (offering with beer) have died." This was not strictly true, as he admitted elsewhere, for even in Musulumba, the village most under mission influence of any in our sample, a few continued to offer. In the good harvest year of 1998, when grain was plentiful, some ten households made an offering during the Christmas season. A school teacher from the Plateau (herself a Pentecostal) was certain that its people would never give up the *mizimo* or *masabe*. But it is evident that many who should be present refuse to attend when an offering is poured and the performance of certain important rituals now depends on only a few people, as Benard Simalabali commented in 1993, when he wrote of a funeral at Musulumba,

The purification was done by T and his wife who complained that they are always called upon to do the purification when someone in the lineage dies. All of us younger people refuse to do this because of the Church which we have entered.

Diary, Musulumba, May 1994

My father made an offering to the *muzimo* of his brother. He just wanted to make this offering because he had not given beer to that *muzimo* for a long time.... Only a few people came for the beer because there was only a little beer, and when my father made the offering none of his children were present because all of his children are Church. And my mother and her co-wife refused to make the beer because they are Christians.

(Christopher Nkiwani)

Even so, some of the men born about 1960 (including men confirmed as Catholics), who deny that they participate in offerings or other such rituals, became *mizimo* inheritors in the 1990s if this brought them material advantage in the form of inheritance of rights over marriageable women or other assets.

Musulumba is strongly influenced by the presence of the Lusitu Catholic mission on the outskirts of the village, but it is also influenced by its vision of itself as a “progressive village” surpassing in modernity all other villages in its vicinity. Sometimes the latter seems more important to its people than their status as Christians. They may drift among the various churches present in their immediate vicinity, or cease attendance at any, but they show themselves consistent adherents to modernity.

Diary, December 1993, Musulumba Village

This year 1993 at Christmas, nobody drummed *budima*. I think that people are now forgetful of the old customs because there are many Christians and many people have started to follow the customs of the Europeans and of Christianity. Also the elders of long ago who came here to Lusitu started to stop doing the customs they used to do at the old place (before resettlement) and that their fathers and grandfathers had done because of the Bible and also because town entered a little into the villages. Later they gave up doing the customs of long ago especially in Musulumba Village because so many of the young people entered the church. Also Europeanness has increased in the village. I think that here in the village the old custom is gone and the old way of cultivating.
(Christopher Nkiwani)

Pressure to conform to any particular form of religious practice varies with circumstances and from place to place. Where missions or strong local church congregations are present, those who declare themselves Christians are under strong pressure to eschew what are called “pagan” or “heathen” occasions. Where there are concentrations of those who have advanced through school, there is pressure on those with pretensions to learning to avoid what is characterised as “uncivilized behaviour”. When illness is frequent, *mizimo* inheritors

are under strong pressure to continue to officiate at offerings whether they themselves are Christians, sceptics, or believers in the power of the ancestors, so long as any of their kin continue to think themselves afflicted by the neglect of the spirits. Others may be under pressure to participate when divinations find that offerings are rejected because the many who ought to have been present have not come and so suffering is unmitigated. The illness of children brings parents face to face with the demands of kin that they consult diviners and find ways to appease the *mizimo*. Funerals, as I said earlier, are occasions when the clash of interests is made manifest.

If a child dies and both parents wish to follow Christian practices, they may be allowed to go their own way without opposition, as happened in Chezia in 1997 when the child's father refused to carry out the sexual purification with his wife.

Diary, April 1997, Chezia

He told the people to depart the funeral because his daughter is not dead, she is just resting in the ground until the time comes when they are going to meet in heaven when Jesus will come on earth. People never argued with him because it was his child and he is a Seventh Day Adventist and a company leader so he did not want to backslide from the church. That is why he did not want to follow the custom. He was left to cleanse whenever he wants to have sex with his wife.

(Willie Drivus)

When an adult dies, especially one who has been a *muzimo* inheritor, what rituals are used and who is to participate may very well become matters of contention, for many have an interest in how the rituals of death are carried out, and pressure to conform to this standard or that can become extreme. Those involved have to make public choices which they know will have implications for the interpretation of later events. Under the circumstances of rural life, with its many obligations to a spectrum of kin and neighbours, it is difficult to act consistently whatever one may think privately.

Given the diversity that exists among families and within communities, it is amazing that there is so little real contention. But

people know they must live together and usually avoid confrontations which might make it impossible for them to do so. Anger erupts when people have been drinking, but then is more likely to vent itself in accusations of witchcraft than in complaints about dereliction of religious duties. What appears to be important to most people is not whether one declares oneself a Christian or joins a particular church or verbally challenges the existence of *mizimo*, *basangu*, or any other form of spirit, though among the young fundamentalist enthusiasts this may no longer be true. What matters is what one does when called upon to perform appropriately in a role assigned one because this affects others. Here failure to perform is regarded by some as a personal attack, for *mizimo* are thought to punish neglect by attacking any member of the kin group.

The Future of Belief

Given the diversity that exists and the shifting pressures under which most people live, it would be unwise to predict how the young people of the 1990s, including the enthusiasts for belief and Bible, will act when they mature. Some of them may find comfort in the thought that their parents and grandparents and other senior kin continue to care for them after death and provide them with protection, or, if angered by neglect, can be propitiated in rituals tested through time. In that case, the cult of the *mizimo* will survive, and those who approach them may even repudiate the designation of such spirits as demons and servants of Satan. Nevertheless, the ritual of offering has lost many of its implicit connotations now that people offer with beer made from purchased ingredients or substitute such alien drink as *skokian* or *njungulu*, even though these are now the preferred drink of most villagers. Beer is no longer the product of one's toil in fields sown with seed derived initially from the parental hoard. Nor does it have the same implications of communion, now that beer is a commercial commodity available on a daily basis for those with money, rather than a rare luxury made for offering to the ancestors or for summoning community labour. It is also possible that the spirits of the dead may become even more demonized, for one of the tragedies of the AIDS epidemic is that the young die while the old survive, and the young see this as one more piece of evidence that the old are draining their life substance from them, and so must be

witches who may continue their evil ways after death.

This does not mean that Christianity will prosper in the future as it has over the last century. Thayer Scudder (personal communication) suggests that the religion of the future will be fashioned at least in part by the many AIDS orphans and other children whose parents cannot support them. Many will not attend school for any length of time. These may well have less contact with Christianity than did their parents at a similar stage of development, in the absence of religious instruction in schools or guidance by elders. They may also have less reason to think of Christianity as a way to empowerment given their own experience, including the loss of those to whom they looked for support. The AIDS epidemic puts Christianity in question quite as much as it challenges the power of the dead to serve the living. So far it has failed to provide a satisfactory explanation for the existence of so much misery and so many deaths, especially the deaths of children who have not offended in any way. The teaching that *Leza* is a caring god to whom one can turn for comfort and help, is challenged as people try to come to terms with the spread of HIV and AIDS. The havoc caused by AIDS probably makes it easier to believe in the power of Satan over human life and the stigmatization of those with HIV or full-blown AIDS and their associates raises doubts about the community of believers.

Christianity, however, has other handicaps. If people begin to question "civilization" because of its association with the international order, the linkage between Christianity, modernity, civilization and Western societies may have unforeseen consequences. People are aware of what is going on in the world at large as well as in their own immediate vicinity in a way they were not in the 1950s. They are informed of the relationship between many of the economic problems that directly effect them and the policies of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund with their emphasis upon free enterprise, the idolization of the bottom line, and devil take the hindmost. Some Gwembe people talk of suing the World Bank for compensation because it financed the building of Kariba Dam which displaced them from their homeland. People talk of Forex (Foreign Exchange) and the outflow of Zambian resources to pay the interest on debts incurred when exchange rates were less favorable to the dollar and the pound.

They are aware of current attempts at world domination by the United States, Britain, and various European governments, publicized through the war on Iraq and threats of war elsewhere. And they know that the leaders of these countries call themselves devout Christians. Moreover, when drugs for those infected with HIV remained too expensive for any but the rich to afford, a Christianity linked to the United States and other powers that gave priority to the profits of pharmaceutical corporations even though this guaranteed the death of those with AIDS faced difficult questions. Provision of a limited number of the HIV positive with free drugs for five years does not stop the questioning.

In the 1990s, those in rural areas might vent their anger at what seemed wrong with their world upon local targets defined as witches. But witches today are defined by many as agents of Satan, who is seen as having special links with Western countries credited with being the source of evil in many guises. Some accuse the United States or European governments of creating the HIV virus and deliberately releasing it in Africa to reduce the African population. There is talk of Satanic churches whose members prey on others for the blood necessary as their entry fee. The burgeoning lore of *banyama* gangs and gangs of body snatchers identifies them as agents of European (a term that includes Americans as well as Europeans) entrepreneurs who drain life from African victims or carve up their bodies for medical supplies to be sold on the international market. Some also regard Western churches as corrupt, witness the stated desire of some African church leaders to break fellowship with their Western counterparts over such issues as homosexuality and church governance.

Whereas those belonging to Western civilization once claimed the right to validate any form of knowledge, whether this be scientific in nature or knowledge of spiritual things, this is now being challenged, by other faiths and by the increasing disenchantment with the belief that the West knows best. People may still desire the material benefits associated with the West, but they are suspicious both of its benevolence and of its understanding of ultimate things. This must have an impact upon the form Christianity will take in Zambia and elsewhere in Africa and on its ability to attract and hold adherents.

Religious life at the end of the twentieth century was a highly

diverse melange of beliefs and practices, from which people made eclectic choices as they sought to find meaning to their own experiences and ways of dealing with the forces that they perceived as acting upon themselves. The people of the twenty-first century will rework all this in terms of their own perception of the world. Given the diversity of their experiences, it is unlikely that they will develop a single synthesis which all will accept. Given the perception of the transience of material conditions, and the transformations that have taken place during their own lifetimes, it is unlikely that the religions of the future will build on the assumptions of stability that underlay the cults of the *mizimo* and *basangu* and the concept of *Leza* as a creator who had once and for all determined the nature of things. In the twenty-first century, people are unlikely to think that they can ensure themselves of spiritual favour and a good life by claiming to live in the way left to them by those now dead whom they remember, who in turn lived as had their own ancestors. They are too well aware that their parents broke with the ways of their parents and that they too want to live differently. This, of course, is a problem faced by all who ponder the meaning of religion, for religion deals with eternal verities and humans live in a transitory and imperfect world.

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Elizabeth Colson, an American anthropologist, has worked among the Tonga of Southern Province, Zambia, since 1946. In that year she was appointed to the Rhodes Livingstone Institute, now the Institute of Economic and Social Research at the University of Zambia. She first worked among the Plateau Tonga and over the past sixty years she has continued to return to the same villages. From 1956 she began long term research in the Gwembe Valley. Among Professor Colson's many publications on the Tonga are her study of the impact of the Kariba Dam, *The Social Consequences of Resettlement* published in 1971, and, co-authored with Thayer Scudder, *Secondary Education and the Formation of an Elite; The Impact of Education on Gwembe District, Zambia*, published in 1980 and *For Prayer and Profit; The Ritual, Economic and Social Importance of Beer in Gwembe District, Zambia 1950-1982*, published in 1988.

This book on Tonga religious life is based on Professor Colson's own experience of Tonga beliefs and practice and those of her informants. These span the last century as some of her early informants remembered the Ndebele and Lozi raids of the 1890s and the arrival of the first Christian missionaries. She has also drawn on daily diaries kept by research assistants, the field notes of fellow anthropologists and the published research of other scholars. In *Tonga Religious Life in the Twentieth Century* Professor Colson examines 'how Tonga-speaking people have thought about the nature of their world, the meaning of their own lives, and the sources of good and evil over the last century in which their cosmology and society have been transformed'.

ISBN 978-9982-24-045-1



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